

The University of Chicago

JONATHAN EDWARDS'S VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF
THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE

1935

By
CLARENCE H. FAUST

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Reprinted from
JONATHAN EDWARDS: Representative Selections, with
Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes
Copyright, 1935, by American Book Company

JONATHAN EDWARDS'S VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF
THE HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE

1935

By
CLARENCE H. FAUST

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Reprinted from
JONATHAN EDWARDS: Representative Selections, with
Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes
Copyright, 1935, by American Book Company



JONATHAN EDWARDS'S VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

"He that would know the workings of the New England mind in the middle of the last century, and the throbbings of its heart," wrote the historian Bancroft almost a hundred years ago, "must give his days and nights to the study of Jonathan Edwards." ¹

The chief reason why studying Edwards is important to one who wishes to understand eighteenth-century New England is that he played a very prominent part in many of the major philosophical and theological controversies of the time. Between 1736 and 1746, he led one party in the heated debate over the religious upheaval known as the Great Awakening. In the middle of the century, he fought staunchly for the Calvinistic theory of the freedom of the will. A little later, he was the recognized champion of the Calvinistic forces in the bitter conflict over the doctrine of the total depravity of man. Finally, he plunged into the controversy over the nature of virtue and put on the Calvinistic armor in defense of the doctrine of election.

In the midst of these controversies, Edwards erected a stately and well buttressed theological and philosophical system, a system built both of materials inherited from his Calvinistic forebears²

¹Quoted approvingly by one of Edwards's most careful biographers A. V. G. Allen, *Jonathan Edwards* (Boston, 1889), p. vi. See in this connection Oliver Wendell Holmes's essay on Jonathan Edwards, *Works* (1892), VIII, 361 ff. Here Holmes declares that Edwards "stamped his personality and his doctrines on the New England theology of the last century" (p. 389). Another interesting recognition by an unsympathetic although understanding critic is that by Harriet Beecher Stowe. See *The Minister's Wooing*, where Edwards's disciple Samuel Hopkins is the central figure, and *Old Town Folks*, a whole chapter of which ("My Grandmother's Blue Book") is devoted to a criticism of Joseph Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated* (1750), one of the earliest and most influential statements of the Edwardean doctrines.

²The New England churches accepted the Calvinistic statement of faith of the Westminster Assembly as their standard (see Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, New York, 1893).

and of materials boldly seized from the philosophical schools of his time.³

One of the most important aspects of this system is Edwards's view of human nature, a view enormously significant not only because of its wide acceptance in Edwards's day but also because of the violent reaction to it in the following century. An understanding of it involves a comprehension of Edwards's psychological notions, particularly of the conception of the place of the affections or emotions in human nature presented in his writings on the Great Awakening, and of the theory of the freedom of the will set forth in his polemical work on that subject. It involves, too, the grasping, with its ramifications and implications, of Edwards's doctrine of the depravity of man. It must include, also, a comprehension of his theory concerning the nature of virtue, and, finally, an understanding of his doctrine of grace, a doctrine which, standing at the apex of his system, gives unity to the whole.

THE GREAT AWAKENING

Edwards's view of human nature was based on his psychological theories. These were first presented in his writings in defense of the Great Awakening, and were, no doubt, somewhat colored by his desire to justify that highly emotional religious movement.

Hooker, *The Soul's Vocation or Effectual Calling* (London, 1638); John Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist* (1654); Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity in Two Hundred and Fifty Expository Lectures on the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1726).

³ That Edwards's reading had made him widely aware of the chief philosophical movements of his time is attested not only by the numerous references to contemporary philosophical works in his writings but by the so-called "Catalogue of Books," a private record apparently of works he planned to read, which contains some seven hundred entries. The manuscript is at Yale. A transcription and interpretation of it in type-written form is available in the Hammond Library of the Chicago Theological Seminary (James A. Caskey, *Jonathan Edwards' "Catalogue of Books"*). See also Thomas H. Johnson, "Jonathan Edwards' Background of Reading," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, XXVIII, 193-222 (December, 1931).

The Great Awakening began in Edwards's own Connecticut river village, Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1734, and spread finally "over the whole eastern seacoast from Maine to Georgia."⁴ For fifteen years after 1734, waves of religious enthusiasm deluged New England, one of the most notable of these storms coming in 1740 when George Whitefield visited the colonies.⁵

During these years large numbers of New Englanders were enormously stirred. An eyewitness reports that when Edwards preached at Enfield in 1741 his famous, not to say notorious, sermon on "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"—a sermon on the painfully suggestive text "Their foot shall slide in due time"—"the assembly appeared deeply impressed and bowed down with an awful conviction of their sin and danger. There was such a breathing of distress and weeping, that the preacher was obliged to speak to the people and desire silence, that he might be heard."⁶ Throughout the Connecticut valley and the surrounding territory touched by the Great Awakening, "outcries, faintings, and fits" were apparently common, and were, in fact, often welcomed as gracious signs of divine favor.⁷

Many of the revivalists tried deliberately to induce these emotional upheavals in their hearers. One witness of the

⁴Frederick Morgan Davenport, *Primitive Traits in American Revivals* (New York, 1905), pp. 94-132; Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening* (Boston, 1841); Thomas Henry Billings, "The Great Awakening," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, LXV, 89-104 (1929); W. M. Gewehr, *The Great Awakening in Virginia, 1740-1790* (Durham, N. C., 1930). On the important political and economic connections of the Revival see J. C. Miller, "Religion, Finance, and Democracy," *New England Quarterly*, VI, 28-58 (1933).

⁵Whitefield visited Edwards. See an interesting account in Albert Dunning, *Congregationalists in America* (New York, 1894), pp. 236-237. For the significant connection between the Edwardean revival in America and the Wesleyan revival in England, see A. V. G. Allen, *Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 134 n. and 203 n., and Davenport, *Primitive Traits in American Revivals*, p. 133.

⁶Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, p. 216.

⁷See Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, pp. 150-151, 201-203, and chap. xiii, "Edwards—the Revival at Enfield—Outcries, Faintings, and Convulsions." See also Davenport, *Primitive Traits in American Revivals*, pp. 108-126.

emotional extravagance of the movement describes thus the terrifying preaching of eternal damnation by one of the revivalists of the time, the Reverend James Davenport:

At length, he turn'd his Discourse to others, and with the *utmost Strength* of his Lungs address himself to the Congregation, under these and such-like Expressions; viz. You poor unconverted Creatures, in the Seats, in the Pews, in the Galleries, I wonder you don't drop into Hell! It would not surprise me, I should not wonder at it, if I should see you drop down *now, this Minute* into Hell. You Pharisees, Hypocrites, *now, now, now*, you are going right into the Bottom of Hell. I wonder you don't drop into Hell by *Scores*, and *Hundreds*, etc. . . . Then he came out of the Pulpit, and stripped off his upper Garments, and got into the Seats, and leapt up and down some time, and clapt his Hands, and *cried out* in those Words, the War goes on, the Fight goes on, the Devil goes down, the Devil goes down; and then betook himself to *stamping* and *screaming* most dreadfully.⁸

It is small wonder that under such preaching there was "*swooning away and falling to the Ground . . . bitter Shriekings and Screamings; Convulsion-like Tremblings and Agitations, Strugglings and Tumblings.*"⁹

It must of course be said that men like Edwards were not guilty of the kind of sensationalism just described, and yet some of the most startling psychological disturbances recorded of the Great Awakening took place in Edwards's own congregation and were piously reported by him in his first work dealing with the Revival—*A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1736). This account includes the story of a young woman who declared that "it was pleasant to think of lying in the dust

⁸ Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (Boston, 1743), pp. 98–99. For a description of the character of the half-mad Davenport see *ibid.*, pp. 183–200, and Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, pp. 230–255.

⁹ Chauncy, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

all the days of her life, mourning for sin," who furthermore "had great longings to die," and who, when her brother had read from the book of Job "concerning worms feeding on the dead body," said "with a pleasant smile" that "it was sweet to her to think of being in such circumstances."¹⁰ It includes, too, the story of four-year-old Phebe Bartlet who retired to her closet at midday to weep and pray for her sins, and who was observed "exceedingly crying and wreathing her body to and fro, like one in anguish of spirit" for fear of going to hell.¹¹ It contained, finally, the tale of the melancholy man who "was hurried with violent temptations to cut his own throat, and made an attempt, but did not do it effectually."¹² Edwards's own report of the Revival, then, supports the testimony of other witnesses and makes it sufficiently clear that at the time, in many parts of New England at least, the "passions" were in the saddle.¹³

The Congregational and Presbyterian ministry of Massachusetts and Connecticut were sharply divided in their attitude toward this phenomenon.¹⁴ The "opposers" were led by Charles Chauncy, pastor of the old First Church in Boston. He objected strenuously to the "preaching of terror" with its attendant "bodily effects," to use a phrase common in the controversial literature of the time.¹⁵ "'Tis too well known to need much to be said upon it," wrote Chauncy, "that the *Gentlemen*, whose preaching has been *most remarkably* accompanied with these *Extraordinaries*, not only use, in their

¹⁰ *Works* (New York, 1858), III, 260-265. Except where otherwise noted, references to Edwards's works are to this edition, which is a reprint of the Worcester edition (see Bibliography).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III, 265-269.

¹² *Ibid.*, III, 269.

¹³ The word *passions* had in the eighteenth century about the significance of our word *emotions*. "Any kind of feeling by which the mind is powerfully affected or moved" (*New English Dictionary*).

¹⁴ See Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, pp. 286-372, for an account of this bitter controversy. Dexter's bibliography, *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as Seen in its Literature*, (New York, 1880), lists 59 books, most of them plainly controversial, on the Revival between 1742 and 1745 alone.

¹⁵ *Seasonable Thoughts*, pp. 76-108.

Addresses to the People, all the *terrible Words* they can get together, but in such a Manner, as *naturally* tends to put *weaker Minds* out of the Possession of themselves." ¹⁶

Chauncy's objection to the preaching of terror was part of a more sweeping condemnation of the Revival. He felt that the religious enthusiasts of the Awakening appealed merely to men's passions. He was disgusted by the irrational extravagance of the movement. It was, he charged, "a *plain stubborn Fact*, that the *Passions* have, *generally*, in *these Times*, been apply'd to, as though the *main Thing* in Religion was to throw them into Disturbance." ¹⁷ Violently he attacked the whole movement as a vain and dangerous explosion of emotion. "Nor unless some Persons are made sensible" of this fact, he wrote, "and take Care to keep their Passions within the Restraints of Reason, may it be expected that Things should be reduced to a State of Order." ¹⁸

The phrase "Passions within the Restraints of Reason" indicates the fundamental principle upon which Chauncy based his condemnation of the Awakening. He believed that in all things reason should govern. "The plain Truth," he insisted, is that "an *enlightened Mind*, and not *raised Affections*, ought always to be the Guide of those who call themselves Men; and this, in the Affairs of Religion, as well as other Things." ¹⁹ "Reasonable Beings," he declared, "are not to be guided by

¹⁶ *Seasonable Thoughts*, pp. 94, 311.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 302. The *Dictionary of American Biography* contains, in an excellent sketch of Chauncy, the statement that "He was undoubtedly the most influential clergyman of his time in Boston, and, with the exception of Jonathan Edwards, in all New England, becoming the acknowledged leader of the liberals of his generation." For an analysis of Chauncy's rationalism see G. A. Koch, *Republican Religion* (New York, 1933), pp. 191-195. See also Williston Walker, *Ten New England Leaders* (New York, 1901), pp. 267-310; W. C. Fowler, *Memorials of the Chaunceys* (1858), pp. 49-70.

¹⁸ *Seasonable Thoughts*, p. 422.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 327. In this connection, Chauncy quotes Isaac Watts's *Discourse on the Use and Abuse of the Passions* (p. 420).

Passion or Affection, though the Object of it should be GOD, and the Things of another World.”²⁰

Chauncy realized that his most noteworthy opponent in the controversy over the merits of the Great Awakening was Jonathan Edwards. He did not mince matters in meeting the challenge that Edwards presented. Although he referred only casually to Edwards’s “Wonderful Narrative,”²¹ he devoted whole sections of his *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* to a destructive analysis of “Mr. Edwards’ . . . late Book, *Some Tho’ts on the Revival of Religion in New-England*.”²² He did not hesitate in analyzing Edwards’s position to cast some slurs upon the man himself, suggesting in one place that Edwards might “not be suppos’d to be in a proper Temper of Mind to receive the Truth,”²³ and declaring boldly in another connection that Edwards had defended the Revival “with such Arguments, as I can’t suppose will be thought to carry in them much Weight.”²⁴

Against the charges which the “opposers” of the Great Awakening under the leadership of Chauncy were making, Edwards strenuously defended the movement. He was, on the whole,²⁵ heartily convinced that it was “a surprising work of

²⁰ *Seasonable Thoughts*, p. 324. See also *ibid.*, pp. 310–313.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 81–93, 301–332.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 307; see also p. 385.

²⁵ Edwards did not approve of the “censoriousness” of some of the revivalists, particularly their habit of attacking as “unconverted” preachers who did not welcome the revival (*Works*, I, 559 ff., and III, 391 ff.). He objected, also, to lay preaching (*Works*, III, 397 ff.). And he condemned the following of “impulses and impressions” as though they were immediate revelations from God (*Works*, I, 556 ff. and III, 364 ff.). Allen observes that Edwards was objecting to what “the early Puritans themselves had dreaded as the necessary outcome of Quaker preaching” (*Life*, p. 178). Edwards was faithful to the Puritan tradition in condemning “enthusiasm” like that of Anne Hutchinson and her followers (*Works*, III, 122). His tests for true religious experience were so stringent that he cannot be classed with the unthinking enthusiasts for the Revival. He warns his readers that a great stirring of the affections, marked “bodily effects,” a great deal of noise, “fluent, fervent, and abundant” talking about religion, vivid imaginings, even a feeling of assurance of salvation

God," and that it was therefore wicked to oppose it. So certain was he that the Awakening was a gloriously divine event that he was ready to defend what Chauncy considered one of its least defensible aspects—the preaching of terror. He brushed aside the objection to throwing people into a state of fear with the observation that since there is a hell men must be frightened into keeping out of it. "Some talk of it as an unreasonable thing to fright persons to heaven," he wrote, "but I think it is a reasonable thing to endeavor to fright persons away from hell. They stand upon its brink, and are just ready to fall into it, and are senseless of their danger. Is it not a reasonable thing to fright a person out of a house on fire?"²⁶

There is ample evidence that Edwards was not guilty of any mistaken softheartedness in the matter.²⁷ He did not hesitate to terrify his listeners into fleeing the wrath to come. In a sermon entitled *The Fearfulness which Will Hereafter Surprise Sinners in Zion, Represented and Improved*, he pictured the devils snatching the damned soul as it forsakes the body and plunging it into the ocean of fire, the billows of which, "greater than the greatest mountains, will never cease to roll over them . . . following one another forever and ever."²⁸ Plainly, Edwards was defending his own practice when he insisted upon the necessity of terrifying unregenerate men with pictures of their future torments. The famous *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* with its fearful pronouncement that the "God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and

are not certain marks of a truly religious state (*Works*, III, 22 ff., 530 ff.). The chief evidence of "gracious affections," he declared, was good fruit in a Christian life (III, 60, 155 ff.).

²⁶ *Works*, I, 538.

²⁷ It may be worth noting that the belief in the wisdom of making men vividly aware of the terrors of damnation was not peculiar to the Puritans. Augustine, Dante, and Donne, to cite notable examples, plainly had the same attitude as Edwards toward the matter.

²⁸ *Works*, IV, 492–496.

is dreadfully provoked,"²⁹ is representative of an important element in Edwards's preaching. It is true that Edwards was much more than a sensational preacher of hell-fire sermons, but no fully rounded picture of the man can disregard that aspect of his work.

Completely in agreement at this point both in theory and in practice with the "New Lights," as the ministers who participated in the Great Awakening were called, he stood at all major points in the controversy squarely with them and squarely in opposition to Chauncy and to the group of which Chauncy was the acknowledged spokesman. Chauncy bewailed the overemphasis upon the affections and the passions in the Revival. Edwards complained that they were not played upon enough. "Our people," he wrote, "do not so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched."³⁰ Chauncy declared that religion ought to be primarily a matter of reason, that "an *enlightened Mind*, and not *raised Affections*" ought to be the guide in religion as in all other things. Edwards asserted that religion is primarily a matter of the affections, and devoted *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections* (1746) to proving the point. In an earlier pronouncement he had replied to those who had objected to the attempts of revivalists to stimulate the emotions of their hearers: "I should think myself in the way of my duty, to raise the affections of my hearers as high as I possibly can, provided they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with."³¹ It is plain that the core of their differences was the question of the place of emotion, of the passions or the affections, in religion.

It is against this background of controversy that Edwards's psychological theories must be seen, theories that are fundamental in his view of human nature. The fact is that Edwards could not be content with an unreasoned statement of his belief

²⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 318.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 336.

³¹ *Idem.*

in the kind of religion which the Great Awakening produced and encouraged. He had to justify his position, not merely on Scriptural grounds, but on philosophical grounds as well. During the course of the controversy, he seems to have become increasingly aware of the need for placing his defense of the emotionalism of the Revival on a sound basis psychologically. His last work in vindication of the movement, *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, begins with a careful analysis of the operations of the human mind, an analysis which, while resting firmly on Christian tradition, obviously reflects contemporary notions of psychology, and which can only be fully appreciated in the light of them.

EDWARDS'S ANALYSIS OF THE HUMAN MIND

Edwards began this analysis by asserting that the human mind has two faculties—understanding and will.³² This division of the mind was, of course, perfectly conventional.³³ It went back to the Middle Ages and had been employed with full recognition of its commonness by Locke in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), which Edwards had greedily devoured while in college.³⁴

³² *Works*, III, 3. See also the sermon, *Reality of Spiritual Light* (IV, 442), and *The Medium of Moral Government* (*Works*, 1817 edition, VIII, 236).

³³ The wide general acceptance of this classification of the faculties of the mind may be seen in the following references: John Calvin, *Institutes* (1813), I, 180; Thomas Shepard, *The Sound Believer* (London, 1659), p. 183; Thomas Hobbes, *Human Nature*, in *Works* (London, 1840), IV, 2; Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité . . .* (1674; Paris, 1893), I, 20; Richard Cumberland, *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature* (London, 1727), p. 94; Isaac Watts, *Works* (London, 1811), VI, 250.

³⁴ According to the psychology current in the Middle Ages and generally accepted during the Renaissance, man possessed three souls, or as it was sometimes put, the soul of man had three sets of powers—vegetable, sensible, and rational. The rational soul had two powers, understanding and will. See Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Pt. I, sec. 1, mem. 2, subsect. 9; Edward Dowden, "Elizabethan Psychology," in

The understanding, wrote Edwards, is that faculty of the soul "by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns, and views, and judges of things." As he employed the term, it included four important operations of the mind—sensation, imagination, memory, and judgment.

Edwards had apparently come very early to the conclusion that all the activities of the mind designated by the term *understanding* depended upon sensation. In the projected "Treatise on the Mind," planned while he was a student at Yale, he hoped, according to his notebook, to show "how the mind would be without ideas, except as suggested by the Senses" and how "Reasoning, Contemplation, etc. depend on this."³⁵ Even the devil, he pointed out in *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, could insinuate ideas into a man's mind only by exciting in it impressions of external objects or by awakening in it recollections of sensations once experienced.³⁶ This notion of the dependence of the understanding upon sensation may have come from Locke, who had declared in the *Essay* that even the most abstruse ideas had their origin in the senses.³⁷

A psychologist who believed that all thought was dependent upon sensation could not long avoid the problem of the correspondence of sense impressions with the stimulating objects of these impressions. Locke warned his readers against assuming that perceptions or ideas in the mind were "exactly the images and

Essays Modern and Elizabethan (London, 1910); Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (Cambridge, England, 1930).

On the influence of Locke in America see P. Emory Aldrich, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, April, 1879, pp. 31 ff. "Locke's essay was introduced as a text-book in Yale College as early as 1717 and continued to be used there till 1825. . . ." Edwards read Locke while in college, getting, he wrote, more pleasure from it "than the most greedy miser finds, when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold, from some newly discovered treasure" (Serenio E. Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards*, in Edwards's *Works* [New York, 1829], p. 30). It was probably under the stimulation of this experience that he set down, while still in college, notes for a "Treatise on the Mind."

³⁵ Dwight, *Life*, p. 667; see also p. 666.

³⁶ *Works*, III, 123-124.

³⁷ Bk. II, chap. xii, sec. 8.

resemblances of something inherent in the subject; most of those of sensation being in the mind no more the likeness of something existing without us than the names that stand for them are the likeness of our ideas, which yet upon hearing they are apt to excite in us.”³⁸ He went on to distinguish between “three sorts of qualities in bodies.” First, some qualities (solidity, extension, figure, number, and motion or rest) are “real qualities of bodies.” They exist whether we observe them or not, and perception of these qualities gives us an idea “of the thing as it is in itself.” Other qualities (colors, sounds, smells, tastes, etc.) are merely powers to produce certain sensations in us. These qualities, although they give rise to what seem to be images of themselves, are only the capacity of the exciting object to occasion certain impressions, and they have no resemblance to the effects they generate. From these two sorts of qualities in objects, he distinguished a third, which is the power in a body to effect changes in another body so as to make it “operate on our senses differently from what it did before.” So, for instance, the sun has the power to melt wax. In this case, he pointed out, we never make the mistake of regarding the softness of the wax as a quality of the sun. No more should we, he added, consider the light and warmth we perceive when the sun shines upon us as qualities in the sun itself.³⁹

This point, which others besides Locke had made,⁴⁰ became the basis of Edwards’s idealism. His argument from it was carefully elaborated in the youthful *Notes on the Mind*.⁴¹ He began by insisting that our impressions of color are not exact resemblances to something inherent in the thing perceived. “Every knowing philosopher” now grants, he wrote, that colors are

³⁸ *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. II, chap. viii, sec. 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, sec. 23.

⁴⁰ See Hobbes, *Human Nature*, in *Works*, IV 4-9, and *Leviathan*, chap. i; Isaac Watts, *Philosophical Essays on Various Subjects* (London, 1732), p. 277; Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. I, pt. IV, sec. 2.

⁴¹ Dwight, *Life*, pp. 668-669.

not really in things any more than pain is in a needle. He followed up this statement with the declaration that nothing else exists out of the mind any more than color does unless it be "the very substance" of bodies themselves. The ideas that make up what we call body or substance are built upon impressions of color and resistance. If we disregard color, we find that solidity is resistance; that figure is the termination of resistance; that motion is the communication of resistance from space to space. Since it is granted that color has "merely mental existence," "there is nothing out of the mind but Resistance." Now resistance cannot exist outside the mind "when nothing is actually resisted. Then, there is nothing but the Power of Resistance." This Power must depend upon a constant law or establishment. To account for such a law or establishment one must assume the existence of a universal mind. "The world is therefore," Edwards concludes, "an ideal one."⁴² A little later he sums up his position by saying: "Indeed the secret lies here: That, which truly is the Substance of all Bodies, is *the infinitely exact, and precise, and perfectly stable Idea, in God's mind, together with his stable Will, that the same shall gradually be communicated to us, and to other minds, according to certain fixed and exact established Methods and Laws.*"⁴³

The problem of the source of this idealism is, according to I. Woodbridge Riley, "the most difficult in the history of American philosophy." "Was it the product of precocious genius, or an adaptation of the Berkeleian system, or a blending of the idealistic hints and suggestions then in the air?"⁴⁴

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 669.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 674.

⁴⁴ *American Philosophy: The Early Schools* (New York, 1907), p. 129. See here also an excellent summary of the problem. See, too, H. N. Gardiner, "The Early Idealism of Jonathan Edwards," *Philosophical Review*, IX, 573-596 (Nov., 1900); Clarence Gohdes, "Aspects of Idealism in Early New England," *Philosophical Review*, XXXIX, 537-555 (Nov., 1930); Georges Lyon, *L'Idéalisme en Angleterre au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1888); John H. MacCracken, *Jonathan Edwards Idealismus* (Halle, 1899) and his "The Sources of Jonathan Edwards' Idealism," *Philosophical Review*, XI, 26-42 (Jan., 1902); Egbert C. Smyth, "Jonathan Edwards' Idealism,"

Although in the first flush of his enthusiasm for the theory Edwards plainly intended to publish the doctrine and to fight for its acceptance,⁴⁵ it is not formally presented in Edwards's later work. There is no reason for thinking that he abandoned it; indeed it is implicit in much of what he wrote. But his early intention to force it upon the attention of the world was given up. Perhaps he felt it unnecessary to complicate the various controversies in which he was engaged by insistence upon it. Furthermore, he had even in the beginning felt that it was of no practical importance, for in the "Notes on Mind" he wrote that even if one accepted the notion that the material universe existed only mentally, one might still "speak in the old way, and as properly and truly as ever."⁴⁶

Sensation, which, according to his theory of idealism, is the apprehension of the ideas which God has willed to communicate to us, furnishes the material for two other functions of the understanding—imagination and memory. The term *imagination* plays so important a part in the *Treatise concerning Religious Affections* that Edwards took time to define it carefully for his readers. It is, he said, that power of the mind by which one has an image of the things which are the objects of sense when those things are not actually present to be perceived by the senses. So one has a lively idea of a shape, or of a color, or of marks on paper, or of a voice when one "does not really see, hear, smell, taste, nor feel."⁴⁷ Memory, which like imagination depends upon sensation, differs from it only in being accompanied by a consciousness that the idea has been entertained formerly and that its presence in the mind formerly is the

American Journal of Theology, I, 950-964 (Oct., 1897), and his "Some Early Writings of Jonathan Edwards," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, N.S. X, 212-247 (Oct., 1896). See Bibliography for statements of the positions of these writers.

⁴⁵ Dwight, *Life*, p. 671.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 669.

⁴⁷ *Works*, III, 74-75.

cause of its reappearance.⁴⁸ These notions concerning imagination and memory were commonplaces in Edwards's time.⁴⁹

The fourth of the powers of the mind which Edwards included in the term *understanding* is reason or judgment. He defined reason as "that power or faculty an intelligent being has to judge of the truth of propositions; either immediately, by looking on the propositions, which is judging by intuition and self-evidence; or by putting together several propositions, which are already evident by intuition, or at least whose evidence is originally derived from intuition."⁵⁰

A great deal of light is thrown upon Edwards's opinions concerning two of these four operations of the mind designated by the term *understanding*, from an examination of his beliefs about the physiology of sensation and imagination. The sensations upon which all thinking was dependent were, according to Edwards, conveyed from the organs of sense to the brain by the animal spirits. External ideas, he said, "may be raised only by impressions made on the body, by moving the animal spirits, and impressing the brain."⁵¹ These spirits were subtle fluids or vapors filling the nerves as water fills a pipe. They carried impressions from the organs of sense along the nerves to the brain and also conveyed impulses of the will from the brain to the muscles, stimulating them to movement.

In its broad outlines, the theory current in Edwards's day was as follows.⁵² In the brain, which was the fountain of the

⁴⁸ Dwight, *Life*, p. 680.

⁴⁹ Watts, *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 91-92; Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy*, in *Works*, I, 396, and *Leviathan*, chap. ii; Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. I, Pt. I, sec. 3; Locke, *Essay*, Bk. II, chap. x, sec. 2.

⁵⁰ *Miscellaneous Observations*, in *Works* (London, 1817), VIII, 216. See *Religious Affections*, in *Works* (New York, 1858), III, 119, and *Reality of Spiritual Light*, in *Works*, IV, 448. See Locke, *Essay*, Bk. IV, chap. xiv.

⁵¹ *Works*, III, 78, 122-123.

⁵² The theory concerning the animal spirits in the eighteenth century must not be confused with that current in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. For the former see a succinct statement by Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Pt. I, sec. 1, mem. 2, subsect. 2; Dowden, "Eliza-

animal spirits, certain subtle, airy substances were supposed to be separated from the coarser elements of the blood. These spirits filled the brain and the nerves, which were thought of as hollow tubes stretching from it to all parts of the body. Any stimulation of the organs of sense set them into motion, and so sense impressions were carried through the nerves to the brain. In the same fashion, mental impulses were supposed to agitate the spirits in the brain and so to be carried by the proper nerves to the organs of motion, where they stimulated to action the appropriate muscles. It is important to observe, in this connection, that abnormal disturbances of the animal spirits, such as could be induced by drink, or by the disease of melancholy, or by great mental excitement, might, by setting the spirits into a ferment, bring about illusions of the senses and involuntary movements of the muscles.⁵³

It is plain, then, that as agents of sensation the animal spirits played an important part in the functioning of that faculty of the mind which Edwards labeled the understanding, and that as messengers of volition they were important in the activity of the other faculty of the mind—the inclination or will.

Edwards defined the inclination as the faculty “by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers.”⁵⁴

bethan Psychology”; and Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*. For the changes in the theory as a result of Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood see Sir Michael Foster, *Lectures on the History of Physiology during the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, England, 1901), pp. 12 ff.

⁵³ For an exposition of the theory of the spirits see Foster, *Lectures on the History of Physiology*, pp. 275–276. See also *The Tract on Man*, in *The Philosophy of Descartes in Extracts from his Writings*, trans. by Henry P. Torrey (New York), pp. 276–279; Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy*, in *Works*, I, 403, 391, 392, 397; Henry More, *An Account of Virtue* (London, 1690), p. 43; Cumberland, *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature* (London, 1727), pp. 144 ff.; John Mayhew, *On Muscular Motion and Animal Spirits in Medico-Physical Works* (Chicago, 1908), pp. 229–302 (the work was first published in 1674); Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. I, Pt. IV, sec. 2.

⁵⁴ *Works*, III, 3.

The term *heart*, he said, is sometimes used in speaking of this faculty, for strong inclinations disturb the motion of the blood and the animal spirits and so give rise to sensations “especially about the heart and vitals, that are the fountain of the fluids of the body: from whence it comes to pass, that the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, perhaps in all nations and ages, is called the *heart*.”⁵⁵

The exercises of the inclination are of two kinds—liking and disliking, that is, inclination toward and aversion from the things perceived by the understanding. In *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, Edwards wrote, in terms very close to those employed by Locke and Hutcheson, “The exercises of this faculty are of two sorts; either those by which the soul is carried out towards the things that are in view, in approving of them, being pleased with them, and inclined to them; or those in which the soul opposes the things that are in view, in disapproving of them, and in being displeased with them, averse from them, and rejecting them.”⁵⁶

These two sorts of passions or affections⁵⁷ do not, according to Edwards, occupy equal positions. Love, he said, is the chief of the affections and the fountain of all others. Out of love for a thing flows hatred for its opposite or for whatever opposes it, and out of love and hatred come all the other affections—desire, hope, joy, gratitude, complacency, on the one hand; fear, anger, grief, and the like, on the other.⁵⁸ In some affections there is a mixture of the two sorts. In pity, for example, there is love toward the person suffering and hatred toward what he suffers.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Cf. Locke’s *Essay*, Bk. II, chap. xx, and Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (London, 1755), I, 7. See also Hobbes, *Works*, IV, 31 ff.

⁵⁷ The terms passion, affection, inclination, and will are all used by Edwards in referring to the second faculty of the mind. His identification of will and inclination is an important point in his philosophy (*Works*, III, 3–4, 279).

⁵⁸ *Works*, III, 5.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE
GREAT AWAKENING

The point about the affections which Edwards was chiefly concerned with making in the *Treatise* was that they were the "spring of men's actions." They, he said, make the world go around, for unless a man is moved by some affection, he is by nature inactive. Take away affection and human activity ceases. "Take away all love and hatred, all hope and fear, all anger, zeal, and affectionate desire, and the world would be, in a great measure motionless and dead; there would be no such thing as activity amongst mankind, or any earnest pursuit whatsoever."⁵⁹

Now what is true in worldly things, argued Edwards, is also true in religious matters. There, too, the affections are the springs of action.⁶⁰ They are, he declared, "the very life and soul of all true religion."⁶¹ In fact, "there can be no true religion without them."⁶² And since love is the chief of the affections, "the essence of all true religion lies in holy love."⁶³

For this position it seemed to Edwards that he had ample Biblical authority. "The scriptures," he wrote, "represent true religion, as being summarily comprehended in *love*, the chief of the affections, and the fountain of all other affections." Among the "innumerable texts" which, he said, might be quoted in support of this assertion he placed Jesus's saying: "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*"⁶⁴

If the affections as the spring of conduct are essential to all

⁵⁹ *Works*, III, 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, III, 279.

⁶² *Ibid.*, III, 19-20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, III, 10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* The importance of Edwards's lifelong immersion in the Christian tradition must not be lost sight of in analyzing his indebtedness to contemporary philosophy.

true religion, Edwards pushed on to say, then men like Charles Chauncy of Boston who criticized the Great Awakening, that "late extraordinary season," because during that time the affections were greatly raised in religion were plainly wrong.⁶⁵ Edwards felt sure that "the prevailing prejudice against religious affections at this day, in the land" was the work of that shrewd enemy of all good, Satan.⁶⁶ Solemnly he warned the critics of the Revival that "for persons to despise and cry down all religious affections, is the way to shut all religion out of their own hearts, and to make thorough work in ruining their souls."⁶⁷

Edwards was not satisfied, however, to let the matter of the Revival rest upon the assertion that since the passions were the springs of conduct, religion must consist primarily in gracious affections. One of his prime interests in *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections* was the distinction between true religion and false religion. He was as ready to condemn much of the religious enthusiasm of the Great Awakening as were its bitterest opponents. How was the good to be distinguished from the bad? His answer was an elaborate attempt to indicate the differences between a purely natural religion and one that is supernatural.

In making this distinction, he first of all introduced the notion that to the natural faculties of men, the understanding and the will, there is added in the regenerate man a new sense, which he called the "supernatural sense," a new power that can come to man only by an act of divine grace. He insisted emphatically that "those gracious influences which the saints are subjects of, and the effects of God's Spirit which they experience, are entirely above nature, altogether of a different kind from anything that men find within themselves by nature, or only in the exercise of natural principles; and are things which no

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 18–20; see also III, 334–336, 279–288.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 19–20.

improvement of those qualifications, or principles that are natural, no advancing or exalting of them to higher degrees, and no kind of composition of them, will ever bring men to; because they not only differ from what is natural, and from everything that natural men experience, in degree and circumstances, but also kind; and are of a nature vastly more excellent." "And this," he added, "is what I mean, by supernatural, when I say that gracious affections are from those influences that are supernatural."⁶⁸

The supernatural sense, for one thing, gives to regenerate men a "new kind of perception or sensation."⁶⁹ This "apprehension, idea, or sensation of mind . . . the natural man discerns nothing of, and has no manner of idea of (agreeable to 1 Cor. 2. 14), and conceives of no more than a man without the sense of tasting can conceive of the sweet taste of honey, or a man without the sense of hearing can conceive of the melody of a tune, or a man born blind can have a notion of the beauty of the rainbow."⁷⁰ This new apprehension of spiritual values does not consist in the "compounding of that kind of perceptions or sensations which the mind had before." In short, it is "what some metaphysicians call a new simple idea."⁷¹

Here he is obviously thinking of the distinctions among ideas made by such men as Locke, who used the term *simple idea* to describe an idea which "contains in it nothing but one uniform appearance or conception of the mind, and is not distinguishable into different ideas," while he employed the term *complex idea* for an idea compounded from simple ones. In receiving simple ideas the mind, he said, is "wholly passive"; whereas in forming complex ones it is active. So the mind combines the simple

⁶⁸ *Works*, III, 70-71. See also important sermon on *A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God*, *ibid.*, IV, 438-450.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 71.

⁷⁰ *Religious Affections*, *ibid.*, III, 72. Note here the fusion of scriptural teaching with contemporary psychological doctrine.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

ideas of coldness and hardness, which it has passively received, into the complex idea of ice.⁷²

It is easy to see, then, why Edwards, accepting as we have noted the sensationalism of Locke, should attempt to account for the difference between the natural man and one supernaturally regenerate by devising the notion of a new sense, a sense which the unregenerate man does not possess, a sense by which the elect passively receive simple, uncompounded impressions as the basis for spiritual knowledge in a way by which the non-elect cannot possibly acquire them.

This doctrine is the rational basis of Edwards's mysticism. "The inward principle from whence they [the gracious affections] flow, is something divine, a communication of God, a participation of the divine nature, Christ living in the heart, the Holy Spirit dwelling there, in union with the faculties of the soul, as an internal vital principle, exerting his own proper nature, in the exercise of those faculties."⁷³ It is true of course that Edwards saw all mental activity as finally dependent upon God. In his view the sensations upon which all thinking was based were simply, as we have seen, perceptions of God's ideas; imagination and memory were the reappearance of these ideas when the exciting cause was not operating to present them; judgment was the discovery of agreement or disagreement among these ideas, and was tested by the fixed connection between them in the mind of God. But the supernatural principle operated in men in a way different from and above all this. The difference, said Edwards, was that God "acts upon the mind of a natural man, but he acts in the mind of a saint as an indwelling vital principle . . . he doth unite himself to them."

For instance, he may excite thoughts in them, may assist their

⁷² *Essay*, Bk. II, chaps. ii and xii.

⁷³ *Works*, III, 186. Again he says: "This light is such as effectually influences the inclination, and changes the nature of the soul. It assimilates the nature to the divine nature, and changes the soul into an image of the same glory that is beheld" (IV, 449).

natural reason and understanding, or may assist other natural principles, and this without any union with the soul, but may act, as it were, as upon an external object. But as he acts in his holy influences and spiritual operations, he acts in a way of peculiar communication of himself; so that the subject is thence denominated spiritual.⁷⁴

Having expounded his theory of the supernatural sense, Edwards addressed himself to the problem of distinguishing between the emotionalism of the Revival that was spurious and the true religion, which the gift of this supernatural sense induced. Many people have had experiences, he said, which they have taken to be "spiritual discoveries." They have seen visions; they have heard voices; they have had sudden, amazing revelations of truth and impulses to action.⁷⁵ Like Chauncy,⁷⁶ Edwards condemned these impulses and impressions. He regarded them as "enthusiastic delusions."⁷⁷ He saw nothing in such experiences which could be ascribed to the possession of the supernatural sense. They were merely "impressions upon the imagination." In fact, they were exactly the sort of thing he expected the overheated imagination to bring.⁷⁸

Edwards felt the grave necessity of warning people that impressions on the imagination might easily be mistaken for supernatural inspirations. He had the authority of Locke for the assertion that enthusiasm had its roots in the imagination, that it consisted in the illusion that what had "settled itself strongly" upon the imagination was "an illumination from the spirit of God."⁷⁹ In his earliest writing concerning the Revival,

⁷⁴*A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Works*, IV, 440. See also *Religious Affections*, *ibid.*, III, 67 ff.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, III, 75.

⁷⁶Chauncy gives a great deal of space (*Seasonable Thoughts*, pp. 178 ff.) to warning his readers that the regard for "*Impulses and Impressions*" is highly dangerous.

⁷⁷*Religious Affections, Works*, III, 74.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, III, 259; see also III, 74-76.

⁷⁹*Essay*, Bk. IV, chap. xix, secs. 5-7.

A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, he declared that he had used the "utmost Caution" in directing people to distinguish "between what is spiritual, and what is merely imaginary."⁸⁰ The difference between spiritual understanding and all kinds of enthusiastical delusions, as he pointed out at length in *Religious Affections*, is that the former is based upon the supernatural sense; the latter, upon mere natural imagination.⁸¹ "And a very great part of the false religion that has been in the world, from one age to another," has grown out of the sad error of mistaking the impressions of the imagination for supernatural revelations.⁸² He felt about the dangers of the imagination in religion as did Bishop Butler, who said, "Indeed amongst creatures naturally formed for religion, yet so much under the powers of imagination, so apt to deceive themselves, and so liable to be deceived by others as men are; superstition is an evil, which can never be out of sight."⁸³

Edwards believed that the imagination was the "devil's grand lurking place, the very nest of foul and delusive spirits."⁸⁴ It was, according to his psychology, the devil's best door to the soul. As we have seen, the only way that ideas could be excited in the mind either as sensations or as imaginations was by the motion of the animal spirits. The agitation of the spirits so as to excite the fancy was, then, the devil's only way of attacking the human soul. "But if it be so," he wrote, "that the devil cannot produce thoughts in the soul immediately, or in any other way

⁸⁰ *Works*, II, 259. See "Directions for Judging of Persons' Experiences," *Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (1865), p. 183.

⁸¹ *Works*, III, 74-79, 121-124.

⁸² *Ibid.*, III, 123. See also III, 77-78 and IV, 440.

⁸³ *Works* (1900), I, 213. See also the *Analogy* (Pt. I, chap. i). On imagination as a cause of religious enthusiasm see Glanvil, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), p. 99, and Hobbes's *Leviathan* (*Works*, III, 9). For a discussion of the notion that the errors of religious enthusiasm had their roots in the imagination, see Umphrey Lee, *The Historical Backgrounds of Early Methodist Enthusiasm* (New York, 1931).

⁸⁴ *Works*, III, 122.

than by the animal spirits, or by the body, then it follows, that he never brings to pass any thing in the soul, but by the imagination or phantasy, or by exciting external ideas.”⁸⁵ At this point, Edwards agreed with his opponent Charles Chauncy, who quoted Charnock’s statement that Satan works upon the soul by means of the humours of the body, particularly by the animal spirits.⁸⁶

Not all imagination, said Edwards, is, however, of so fearful an origin as this. While what appears to be a supernatural revelation may be only the devil’s work in the imagination by way of the animal spirits, not all imagination is demoniacal. The animal spirits may be set into commotion by the passions,⁸⁷ even by the “gracious affections” properly stimulated in the Revival. Indeed, “gracious affections which are very strong, do excite lively ideas in the imagination.”⁸⁸ Such effects need not be looked upon as the malicious work of the Evil One, nor, of course, as supernatural inspirations. They should be regarded as simply “the accidental effect, or consequences of the affections, through the infirmity of human nature.”⁸⁹ Although they are not in themselves admirable, they do indicate an admirable response of the heart to religious truth. So he answered the critics of the Revival who condemned the whole movement as merely an orgy of emotionalism generated in the overheated imaginations of the populace.

⁸⁵ *Works*, III, 122. See also III, 77–78. “If the revival of religion be very great in its beginning, yet if this bastard comes in [that is, imagination comes in], there is danger of its doing as Gideon’s bastard Abimilech did, who never left until he had slain all his threescore and ten true-born sons, excepting one, that was forced to fly.”

⁸⁶ *Seasonable Thoughts*, pp. 111–112; also pp. 310–313.

⁸⁷ “Such seems to be our nature, and such the laws of union of soul and body, that there never is in any case whatsoever, any lively and vigorous exercise of the will or inclination of the soul, without some effect upon the body, in some alteration of the motion of its fluids, and especially of the animal spirits” (*Works*, III, 4). See Cumberland, *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature*, p. 127.

⁸⁸ *Works*, III, 124.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 530–532, and III, 124.

Edwards's defense of the Great Awakening against its critics, it may then be said in conclusion, consisted in large part of a careful presentation of psychological principles quite in harmony with the best thought of his time for the purpose of proving that since the passions are the springs of conduct, vital religion must consist chiefly in a holy exercise of them, and that, therefore, the Revival could not be justly condemned because it stimulated men's emotions. He furthermore insisted that the kind of religion which the Revival produced was exactly the kind of religious expression which the supernatural sense bestowed by God's grace on the elect might be expected to bring forth.

THE ATTACK ON ARMINIANISM

Edwards's attack on the "opposers" of the Great Awakening was, in his view, but a campaign on one front against a lifelong enemy. Again and again in his writings he referred to this dreaded and powerful foe—Arminianism. In the early *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, he said that in 1734 Arminian doctrines began to make a "great noise" in the country. The danger at that time was so threatening, he declared, that the "friends of vital piety trembled for fear of the issue," and even unregenerate men became apprehensive that "God was about to withdraw from the land, and that we should be given up to heterodoxy, and corrupt principles."⁹⁰ The extravagant fears of Calvinists during this time were strikingly revealed in the famous Breck case. Late in 1734 Edwards with five other ministers signed a paper advising the church in Springfield, Massachusetts, to discontinue its efforts to secure as its pastor the Rev. Robert Breck, who was suspected of holding Arminian views. The church's disregard of their protest was the signal for a resounding battle, which was featured by numerous pamphlets, special meetings of ecclesiastical bodies,

⁹⁰ *Works*, III, 233-234.

and even the arrest and imprisonment of Breck himself, the whole matter finally going before the General Assembly of Massachusetts for review.⁹¹ Throughout the remainder of Edwards's life, he was deeply concerned with checking the spread of what he called "this fashionable new divinity."

His hatred of Arminianism and his fear of it are easily understandable, for at most important points Arminians stood diametrically opposed to Calvinists.⁹² The followers of the Dutch theologian denied, for example, that some men were absolutely predestined for heaven while others were absolutely doomed to hell, laying down as one of the chief foundations of their argument the principle of the freedom of man's will. Furthermore, although Arminianism had been condemned by the Synod of Dort in 1619, it had spread greatly by the middle of the eighteenth century, being advocated at that time by many English writers of widely separated theological opinions—men who had, however, this much in common: they had no stomach for Calvinism.⁹³ Naturally, then, the movement to which these

⁹¹ Ezra Hoyt Byington, *The Puritan in England and New England* (Boston, 1896), pp. 335–368; and Mason A. Green, *Springfield 1636–1886* (Boston, 1882), pp. 228–258. Francis Albert Christie believes that there were few ministers in New England who held Arminian beliefs before 1734. See "The Beginnings of Arminianism in New England," *Papers of the American Society of Church History* (second series), III, 151–172. Cotton Mather wrote in 1726: "I cannot learn, That among all the Pastors of Two Hundred Churches [in New England], there is one Arminian" (quoted by Walker, *A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, p. 216).

⁹² Although Edwards denied complete dependence upon Calvin and complete acceptance of all his doctrines, he declared that he "should not take it at all amiss, to be called a *Calvinist*" (Preface to *Freedom of the Will*, 1754).

⁹³ In his *History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards says that Arminians "first appeared in Holland about 130 years ago. They take their name from a Dutchman, whose name was *Jacobus Van Harmin*, which, turned into Latin is called *Jacobus Arminius*; and from his name the whole sect are called *Arminians*. This Jacobus Arminius was first a minister at Amsterdam, and then a professor of divinity in the University of Leyden. He had many followers in Holland. There was upon this a synod of all the Reformed Churches called together, who met at Dort, in Holland. The synod of Dort condemned them; but yet they spread and prevailed. They

men belonged seemed to Edwards dangerous—subversive. It had to be crushed.

He was plainly convinced that the crucial point in the controversy between Arminians and Calvinists was the doctrine of the will. In the conclusion to the *Freedom of the Will* (1754) he pointed out that the beliefs which Calvinists most cherished, the beliefs which they thought essential to true Christianity, depended upon the conviction that men did not have the freedom which Arminians ascribed to them; and that, furthermore, all the chief objections to Calvinistic doctrines could be invalidated by establishing the principle of necessity.⁹⁴ Edwards felt, on the other hand, that until the doctrine of necessity was uncontrovertibly proved, the Calvinistic position would be difficult to maintain against the attacks of Arminians. Until this truth was established, he wrote, "it is, to me, beyond doubt, that the friends of those great gospel truths will but poorly maintain their controversy with the adversaries of those truths. They will be obliged often to dodge, shuffle, hide, and turn their backs: and the latter will have a strong fort, from whence they never can be driven, and weapons to use, which those whom they oppose will find no shield to screen themselves from; and they will always puzzle, confound, and keep under

began to prevail in England in the reign of Charles I., especially in the church of England. The church of England divines before that, were almost universally Calvinists; but since that, Arminianism has gradually more and more prevailed, till they are become almost universally Arminians. And not only so, but Arminianism has greatly prevailed among the Dissenters, and has spread greatly in New England, as well as Old" (*Works*, I, 467).

See *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, "Arminianism." For a discussion of early Arminianism in England see Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, 1933), pp. 42-45. See also Godfrey Davies, "Arminian versus Puritan in England, ca. 1620-1640," *Huntington Library Bulletin*, No. 5, pp. 157-179 (April, 1934).

⁹⁴ *Freedom of the Will*, *Works*, II, 176-178. Edwards adds that the Calvinistic belief in "efficacious" and "irresistible" grace, the theory of the limited atonement, and the doctrine of the "infallible perseverance of the saints" all depend upon the doctrine of necessity.

the friends of sound doctrine, and glory and vaunt themselves in their advantage over them; and carry their affairs with a high hand, as they have done already for a long time past.”⁹⁵ Edwards was in fact quite ready to admit that if his adversaries could prove the freedom of the will in the sense in which they understood it, their whole position would have to be accepted. It is small wonder, then, that he believed that the doctrine of necessity was “one of the most important truths of moral philosophy that ever was discussed, and most necessary to be known.”

The men whom he attacked were as much convinced as he of the overwhelming importance of the issue. Samuel Clarke, one of the chief exponents of the doctrine of freedom of the will, had declared, for example, that the problem of the will was “the Question of the greatest Concern of all, in Matters both of Religion and Human Life.”⁹⁶

Firmly persuaded that if Arminianism were to be crushed, that highly desirable end could be achieved only by demolishing its theory concerning the will, Edwards planned a treatise on the subject. Writing to his friend Joseph Bellamy in 1741, he said that he had been engaged “pretty thoroughly in the study of the Arminian Controversy,” and that he had “writⁿ considerably upon it” in his private papers. He asked, furthermore, that Bellamy attempt to discover for him the “best Book on the Arminian side, for the defense of their notion of Free Will.”⁹⁷ Six years later he wrote to his Scottish correspondent Dr. Erskine: “I have thought of writing something particularly and largely on the Arminian controversy . . . beginning first with a discourse concerning the Freedom of the Will and Moral Agency.”⁹⁸ Apparently the plan was laid aside during the

⁹⁵ *Works*, II, 190.

⁹⁶ *Discourse concerning the Being and Attributes of God* (London, 1738), p. 86.

⁹⁷ “Six Letters of Jonathan Edwards to Joseph Bellamy,” *New England Quarterly*, April, 1928, pp. 230–231.

⁹⁸ Dwyght, *Life*, p. 250.

painful period of his difficulties with the church at Northampton. But in 1752, two years after his dismissal from that place, he said in a letter to Erskine that he had begun "to write a little on the Arminian controversy," and that while he had been forced to break off, he hoped yet to carry out his design.⁹⁹ Finally in 1754, the *Freedom of the Will* appeared.

The controversy into which Edwards hurled himself with the publication of this book had been raging long and bitterly in the English intellectual world. Exactly one hundred years before, Hobbes in writing *Of Liberty and Necessity* had spoken of "those vast and involuble volumes concerning *predestination, free-will, free-grace, election, reprobation, etc.*, which fill not only our libraries, but the whole world with their noise and disturbance."¹⁰⁰ In New England, according to President Samuel Johnson of King's College, the controversy, in which he himself had taken a part in opposition to the Calvinists, had been fought with particular violence between the years 1736 and 1744.¹⁰¹

That Edwards had read widely on the subject, as well as thought deeply about it, is revealed not only in his letters and in the references to the work of other men in his own treatise, but by his obvious familiarity with all aspects of the problem as they had been presented in this long controversy.

POSITIVE ARGUMENT IN "FREEDOM OF THE WILL"

Edwards's treatment of the subject which seemed to him of basic importance in the controversy between Calvinists and

⁹⁹ In 1748 Edwards wrote Erskine that he had been diverted from the task of writing against some of the tenets of Arminianism by the unexpected task of preparing a life of Brainerd (*ibid.*, pp. 251, 511).

¹⁰⁰ *Works* (London, 1839), V, 234. See also Anthony Collins, *A Philosophic Inquiry concerning Human Liberty* (London, 1717), pp. 106 ff. A summary of the debate in England may be seen in Archibald Alexander, *Theories of the Will in the History of Philosophy* (1898), pp. 158 ff.

¹⁰¹ *Autobiography, Works*, I, 26, 29. See Johnson's *Letters concerning the Sovereignty of God, Works*, III, 159 ff., and Dexter's list of books centering around these letters.

Arminians and which had for years assumed a large place in his reading and thinking falls conveniently into two major divisions: first, Edwards's positive argument for the necessitarian position and his definition of the term liberty; second, his answers to the chief objections raised against this doctrine by Arminians.¹⁰²

Both of these divisions of his work rest upon one fundamental postulate—the postulate, namely, that every event must have a cause. “I assert,” he wrote, “that nothing ever comes to pass without a Cause. . . . That whatsoever begins to be which before was not, must have a Cause why it then begins to exist, seems to be the first dictate of the common and natural sense which God hath implanted in the minds of all mankind, and the main foundation of all our reasonings about the existence of things, past, present, or to come.”¹⁰³

This postulate had been basic in the arguments of such important necessitarians as Hobbes and Collins. “I conceive,” wrote Hobbes in *Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*, that “nothing taketh beginning from itself, but from the action of some other immediate agent without itself.”¹⁰⁴ And Anthony Collins had argued that man must be a necessary agent, “because all his actions have a beginning. For whatever has a beginning must have a cause.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² It should probably be noted that not all the men whom Edwards labels Arminians would have accepted the title. President Samuel Johnson, for example, although he plainly held Arminian views, objected to that “odious name” (*Works*, II, 26, 50, 161). In the preface to *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards admits that not all the men he attacks can strictly speaking be called Arminians but defends the use of the word as a means of avoiding awkward circumlocutions.

¹⁰³ *Freedom of the Will*, *Works*, II, 26–27. For Edwards's definition of the term *cause* see II, 26 and Dwight, *Life*, pp. 668, 681.

¹⁰⁴ *Works*, V, 372–378. See also *Of Liberty and Necessity*, *Works*, IV, 276. For evidence of Edwards's acquaintance with Hobbes's position, see note 208 below.

¹⁰⁵ *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty* (1717), pp. 57, 49. There is no evidence that Edwards had read Collins, to whose work his own has interesting resemblances. The ideas Collins expressed were, however, obviously current, for the many attacks on his book had given them a wide dissemination.

The particular application of this principle in the *Freedom of the Will* is that volitions cannot arise without causes. There is, Edwards insisted, nothing in the nature of volitional events to exempt them from the law of causation. "It is indeed as repugnant to reason, to suppose that an act of the Will should come into existence without a Cause, as to suppose the human soul, or an angel, or the globe of the earth, or the whole universe, should come into existence without a Cause."¹⁰⁶

Edwards raised then what he called the "grand inquiry," namely, "What determines the Will?" It would be, he remarked, "very tedious and unnecessary at present to enumerate and examine all the various opinions which have been advanced concerning this matter. . . . It is sufficient to my present purpose to say, it is that motive, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the Will."¹⁰⁷

That volitional impulses must unfailingly be the result of motives had naturally been assumed by many earlier writers on the subject. Locke had taken the point for granted,¹⁰⁸ and Leibnitz in his debate with Clarke had declared the assertion that "the *Mind may have good Reasons to act when it has no Motives*," a "Manifest Contradiction."¹⁰⁹

There was nothing new, then, in Edwards's argument that the will is determined by motives. There was nothing new, either, in his corollary statement that it is the strongest motive

¹⁰⁶ *Works*, II, 29. See also section entitled "Whether Volition can Arise without a Cause through the Activity of the Nature of the Soul" (II, 30-32). See Hobbes, *Works*, IV, 274 and V, 372-373.

¹⁰⁷ *Works*, II, 3-4.

¹⁰⁸ *Essay*, Bk. II, chap. xxi, sec. 29.

¹⁰⁹ *A Collection of Papers which passed between the late Learned Mr. Leibnitz and Dr. Clarke*, p. 169. See also *Works*, trans. by George Martin Duncan (New Haven, 1890), p. 172. This assumption was in fact so basic in the arguments of necessitarians that their opponents felt called upon to deny its validity. See Clarke's denial in *Remarks upon a Book Entitled A Philosophical Enquiry concerning Human Liberty* (London, 1717), pp. 26, 43. See also Thomas Chubb, *A Collection of Tracts* (London, 1730), p. 257, and Archbishop King, *Essay on the Origin of Evil* (London, 1731), pp. 258, 247 ff.

which moves the will.¹¹⁰ Locke had made the point in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*,¹¹¹ and Leibnitz had ridiculed the notion that the mind could be moved by anything but the strongest motive.¹¹²

Now the strength of a motive depended, in Edwards's view, upon the degree of "apparent good" presented to the mind in connection with any possible action.¹¹³ The term *good*, he used "as of the same import with *agreeable*."¹¹⁴ Man is moved, then, in the direction of what seems to him most agreeable.¹¹⁵ Edwards was here obviously anxious to exclude any notion of independent activity on the part of the will. As he saw it, the will was purely passive.

This desire to prove the will a merely passive mechanism is evident in the way in which he took pains to make clear at this point a divergence in belief from his admired author Locke. Locke had insisted that will and desire must not be confounded, arguing that the two often run counter to each other. "A man, whom I cannot deny," he said by way of illustration, "may oblige me to use persuasions to another, which, at the same time I am speaking, I may wish may not prevail on him."¹¹⁶ In the same way, will and preference are distinct, "for though a man would prefer flying to walking, yet who can say he ever wills it?"¹¹⁷ To this argument Edwards replied that if a man wills to walk he does not actually prefer flying, that as a matter of fact the immediate object of the will in this case is an external action, the moving of his legs and feet, and that "his willing such an alteration in his body in the present moment, is nothing else but his choosing or preferring such an alteration in his body at such a moment, or his liking it better than the forbearance of it."¹¹⁸ If we carefully distinguish between the

¹¹⁰ *Works*, II, 4.

¹¹² *Works*, p. 167.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Essay*, Bk. II, chap. xxi, sec. 30.

¹¹⁸ *Works*, II, 1-2.

¹¹¹ Bk. II, chap. xxi, sec. 40.

¹¹³ *Works*, II, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 5.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, sec. 15.

real objects of the will, said he, we see that there is no difference between will and preference.

Nor is there any difference, he went on, between will and desire. The "instance which Mr. Locke produces" does not, he said, prove his point. The thing willed in the case of a man's being obliged against his desire to use persuasions upon another is the uttering of certain words. These words the man chooses to utter, and he "does not desire not to utter them." His wishing them not to be effectual is connected with another object than the speaking of them. In short, will and desire may be different for different objects, but they can never be opposed with reference to the same object.¹¹⁹

This insistence that will, preference, desire (Edwards adds choosing, refusing, approving, disapproving, liking, disliking, embracing, rejecting, determining, directing, commanding, forbidding, inclining or being averse, being pleased or displeased) are all merely different names for the act of the will, closed, so Edwards hoped, all the loopholes by which his opponents might drag in some notion of freedom under the guise of opposition among the affections. It was Edwards's eagerness to preclude the possibility of this answer to the argument for necessity that led him to declare over and over again that "the affections of the soul are not properly distinguished from the will."¹²⁰ The point which obviously he was anxious to establish is just this, that the will is always and of necessity drawn in the direction of the greatest apparent good, that man prefers, desires, chooses, and wills it, and that there is in the mind no power to resist the motion toward it.¹²¹

Edwards was anxious to establish this point because he felt that it led inevitably to the conclusion which he wanted to make irrefutable, namely, that the actions of the will are necessarily

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 2-3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 3, 280; II, 104; and Dwight, *Life*, pp. 665, 667.

¹²¹ *Works*, II, 5, 7-8.

determined by something outside itself. His argument hangs together beautifully. An act of the will must, like every other event, have a cause. The cause of a volitional act is the motive to that act, that is, what in the mind's view is the greatest apparent good. The will must then always and of necessity be determined by the dictate of the understanding concerning the goodness, that is, the agreeableness, of the objects proposed for election.

For if the determination of the Will, evermore, in this manner, follows the light, conviction and view of the Understanding, concerning the greatest good and evil, and this be that alone which moves the Will, and it be a contradiction to suppose otherwise; then it is necessarily so, the Will necessarily follows this light or view of the Understanding, and not only in some of its acts, but in every act of choosing and refusing. So that the Will does not determine itself in any one of its own acts; but all its acts, every act of choice and refusal depends on, and is necessarily connected with some antecedent cause; which cause is not the Will itself, nor any act of its own, nor any thing pertaining to that faculty, but something belonging to another faculty, whose acts go before the Will, in all its acts, and govern and determine them.¹²²

This passage is, indeed, not a bad summary statement of Edwards's position with respect to the freedom of the will.¹²³

That position he attempted to make perfectly clear by defining carefully the term *freedom* or *liberty* as he employed it. In a very important passage, he explained that by liberty he meant "*the power, opportunity, or advantage, that any one has to do as he pleases, or conducting in any respect, according to his*

¹²² *Works*, II, 49–50. In interpreting this passage it is necessary to remember that in Edwards's view the understanding, dependent as it was upon the senses—natural and supernatural—, was purely passive.

¹²³ Edwards, it should be added, made a great deal of the argument that God's foreknowledge of events, a foreknowledge he thought amply evidenced in scripture, was uncontrovertable proof that men's wills are not free in the way in which Arminians defined freedom (see *Works*, II, 61 ff.).

pleasure; without considering how his pleasure comes to be as it is."¹²⁴ The question, as he saw it, was can a man do what he wills, not can he will as he wills. As long as he is able to *do* what he chooses, he is free, although he may not be able to choose his choices. Here again Edwards is in the tradition established by Hobbes, Locke, Collins, and others. Hobbes had defined liberty as "*the absence of all the impediments to action that are not contained in the nature and intrinsic quality of the agent.*"¹²⁵ "I acknowledge," he said, "*this liberty, that I can do if I will.*"¹²⁶

The definition of liberty was in fact the core of the controversy over the freedom of the will. Archbishop William King stated the point very clearly in *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*. Philosophers, he wrote, "may be distinguished into two Sects, both admitting of Liberty, the one from external *Compulsion*, but not from internal *Necessity*; the other from both."¹²⁷ Over this ground, Hobbes and Bishop Bramhall had fought with characteristic acrimony in their debate concerning the freedom of the will. Hobbes had, in fact, declared that the chief ground of difference between them was the question whether it were "in a man's power now to choose the will he shall have anon," the notion that men were "free to *do* as they *will* and to *forbear* as they *will*" being accepted by both of them.¹²⁸ The Bishop asserted the distinction here to be one without a difference, to which Hobbes replied that if the Bishop "cannot understand the difference between *free to do if he will*, and *free to will* [he] is not fit, as I have said in the stating of the question, to hear this controversy disputed, much less to be a Writer in it."¹²⁹ The distinction seemed so important to the younger Edwards that in reviewing his father's contribution to the free-

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 183. See also II, 17, 18, 40.

¹²⁵ *Works*, IV, 273.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 240.

¹²⁷ 3rd edition (1739), p. 227. Published in Dublin and London in 1702 as *De Origine Mali*. English translation by Edmund Law in 1729.

¹²⁸ *Works*, V, preface "To the Reader," and pp. 5, 38-39, 189.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 51.

will controversy he declared that "the whole controversy concerning liberty and necessity, depends on the explanation of the word *liberty*, or the sense in which that word is used."¹³⁰

Having defined liberty as the ability of a man to do as he wills, Edwards asserted that no higher liberty than this could be conceived of. No one, said he with characteristic dogmatism, "can rise higher in his conceptions of liberty, than the notion of it which I have explained: which notion is apparently, perfectly consistent with the whole of that necessity of men's actions, which I suppose takes place. And I scruple not to say, it is beyond all their wits to invent a higher notion, or form a higher imagination of liberty."¹³¹ Even that staunch necessitarian Calvin had asked, after presenting the grounds for his belief that man's will was wholly under the power of forces outside himself: "What end could it answer to decorate a thing so diminutive with a title so superb" as *free*?¹³² But Edwards insisted that the freedom he ascribed to the will was the highest "that ever could possibly enter into the heart of any man to conceive."¹³³ Here again he was in agreement with Locke, who asked, "How can we think any one freer than to have the power to do what he will?"¹³⁴

Strictly speaking, then, Edwards did not deny the freedom of the will. He merely defined it so as to limit it to the power of acting upon impulses in the generation of which the mind was wholly passive.

EDWARDS'S ANSWER TO OBJECTIONS

Besides elaborating the argument for necessity and defining carefully just what, in his view, liberty meant, Edwards devoted a great deal of space in the *Freedom of the Will* to a detailed consideration of the chief arguments for what he called "the

¹³⁰ *Works* (Boston, 1854), I, 484.

¹³¹ *Works*, II, 184.

¹³² *Institutes*, Bk. II, chap. ii, sec. 7.

¹³³ *Works*, II, 185.

¹³⁴ *Essay*, Bk. II, chap. xxi, sec. 21.

Arminian notion of Liberty of Will," exposing, so he thought, the fallacies inherent in them.

One of the most important of these was that man as an agent had the power of initiating action, a self-moving and self-determining power; that, in short, he was more than a merely passive creature. The argument for this position rested upon two chief bases and was formulated most convincingly perhaps by Samuel Clarke.

The first of these was an interpretation of the meaning of the terms *agent* and *action*. "To be an *Agent*," said Clarke in his attack on the necessitarian Collins, "signifies, to have a *Power of beginning Motion*," and "*a Necessary Agent or Necessary Action is a Contradiction in Terms*."¹³⁵

A second argument to prove that men as agents have a self-determining power was based upon that fundamental contention of the necessitarians themselves, namely, that every event must have a cause. There must be somewhere in nature, argued Clarke, a "*Self-moving or Active Power or Principle of beginning Motion*," for to suppose otherwise is to suppose "an infinite progression of *dependent Effects without any Cause at all*; an infinite progression of *passive Communications*, without any *Agent*, without *any thing Active at all* in Nature."¹³⁶ Since this supposition is manifestly absurd, it is necessary to assume an independent being behind all the phenomena of nature, a being with the power of beginning motion. The question is whether this being has communicated the power of self-motion to any of his creatures. To this question Clarke replied that since logically any power except that of self-existence can be communicated by a creator, it is possible that men have been

¹³⁵ *Remarks upon a Book Entitled a Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 5-6. See also Clarke, *A Collection of Papers which passed between the late Learned Mr. Leibnitz and Dr. Clarke*, pp. 405, 285; King, *Origin of Evil*, p. 234 n.; and Chubb, *A Collection of Tracts*, p. 311, for further discussion of this argument for freedom.

¹³⁶ *Remarks*, p. 30. See also his *Being and Attributes of God*, pp. 11-15.

endowed with the power of initiating motion. Experience and observation were, he felt, enough to prove that they do possess it.¹³⁷

In the possession of such a power the "Essence of Liberty consists," according to Clarke. This chain of reasoning in the view of its sponsors invalidated the contention of their opponents that since determinations of the will must have causes, the will is necessarily moved by what to the mind is the greatest apparent good. Man as an agent, said they, is a real cause. It is not necessary to look for causes outside the will.¹³⁸

To this whole argument Edwards made specific answer. One of the most devastatingly logical passages in the *Freedom of the Will* deals with the interpretation of the terms *agent* and *action*.

"The word *action*, as Mr. Chubb and many others use it, is," he said, "utterly unintelligible and inconsistent." First they say that word cannot properly be used to signify something that is passive, that is to say, according to their own definition of passiveness, action cannot be an effect. And yet they say that the mind's action is self-determined, that is, the effect of its own determination. "So that here we have this contradiction, that action is always the effect of foregoing choice; and therefore cannot be action."

In the second place, said he, these men declare that necessity is inconsistent with action, that "a necessary action is a contradiction," but they also say that actions "must be determined by the Will and free choice." In short, they make action necessarily the result of choice while declaring that a necessary action is a contradiction in terms.

Furthermore, added Edwards, they speak of action as the beginning of motion, but "they say there is no proper action

¹³⁷ *Being and Attributes of God*, pp. 83 ff.

¹³⁸ Archbishop William King's *Origin of Evil* contains a brilliant statement of the argument. See pp. 264-282 and the notes of Edmund Law, the translator, on pp. 234-239, 246, 258, 351-352.

but what is freely chosen; or, which is the same thing, determined by a foregoing act of free choice." In other words, they assert that action is the beginning of motion and then say that it must be the consequence of a preceding exertion of volitional power.

This analysis is concluded by one of Edwards's most slashing attacks on his opponents, an attack in his very best controversial manner. It reveals how relentlessly he hunted down his antagonists in the thorny thickets of the free-will controversy:

So that, according to their notion of an act, considered with regard to its consequences, these following things are all essential to it, viz., that it should be necessary, and not necessary; that it should be from a cause, and no cause; that it should be the fruit of choice and design, and not the fruit of choice and design; that it should be the beginning of motion or exertion, and yet consequent on previous exertion; that it should be before it is; . . . that it should be self-originated, and also have its original from something else; that it is what the mind causes itself, of its own Will, and can produce or prevent, according to its choice or pleasure, and yet what the mind has no power to prevent, it precluding all previous choice in the affair.

So that an act, according to their metaphysical notion of it, is something of which there is no idea: it is nothing but a confusion of the mind, excited by words without any distinct meaning, and is an absolute nonentity. . . . But it is impossible any idea or notion should subsist in the mind, whose very nature and essence, which constitutes it, destroys it. If some learned philosopher, who had been abroad, in giving an account of the curious observations he had made in his travels, should say, "He had been in *Terra del Fuego*, and there had seen an animal, which he calls by a certain name, that begat and brought forth itself, and yet had a sire and dam distinct from itself; that it had an appetite, and was hungry before it had a being; that his master, who led him, and governed him at his pleasure, was always governed by him, and driven by him where he pleased; that when he moved, he always took a step before the

first step; that he went with his head first, and yet always went tail foremost; and this, though he had neither head nor tail:" it would be no imprudence at all, to tell such a traveller, though a learned man, that he himself had no notion or idea of such an animal, as he gave an account of, and never had, nor ever would have.¹³⁹

Thus did Edwards in a burst of contempt dismiss the argument from the definition of the terms *action* and *agent* upon which believers in the freedom of the will had based in great part their contention for a self-moving power in man. With equal assurance and severity he attacked the notion from other points of view. Arminians contend, he said, in exactly the words used by Clarke, that the liberty of the will most essentially consists in a self-moving power.¹⁴⁰ The belief in such a power, about which he said there has been "a great noise made,"¹⁴¹ was in his view really a rejection of the principle of causation. What it amounted to was a notion that acts of the will "arise from nothing; no cause, no power, no influence being at all concerned in the matter."¹⁴² The argument from the necessity and nature of causation he then applied in analyzing destructively the contention that since the will is self-determined, motives are not real causes of its action.¹⁴³

But his chief objection to the notion of a self-determining power in man was that it led to the following dilemma. If the will in all of its free acts is freely self-determined, then each of them must be preceded by a free act of the will, and that in turn by another, and so on until one comes to a first act of the will. Now if this first act be determined by a previous one, it is not the first act. If, on the other hand, it is not determined by a previous volition, it must, according to the Arminian definition of freedom, not be free, since it is not self-determined. In

¹³⁹ *Works*, II, 123-124.

¹⁴⁰ *Freedom of the Will*, *Works*, II, 20.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II, 25.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, II, 25.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, II, 26 ff.

short, it is "plainly absurd, and a manifest inconsistency, to suppose that the Will itself determines all the free acts of the Will."¹⁴⁴ This chain of reasoning, his famous *reductio ad absurdum*, Edwards employed over and over again. A typical passage follows:

If the Will determines the Will, then choice orders and determines the choice; and acts of choice are subject to the decision, and follow the conduct of other acts of choice. And therefore if the Will determines all its own free acts, then every free act of choice is determined by a preceding act of choice, choosing that act. And if that preceding act of Will or choice be also a free act, then by these principles, in this act too, the Will is self-determined; that is, this, in like manner, is an act that the soul voluntarily chooses; or, which is the same thing, it is an act determined still by a preceding act of the Will, choosing that. And the like may again be observed of the last mentioned act, which brings us directly to a contradiction; for it supposes an act of the Will preceding the first act in the whole train, directing and determining the rest; or a free act of the Will, before the first free act of the Will. Or else we must come at last to an act of the Will, determining the consequent acts, wherein the Will is not self-determined, and so is not a free act, in this notion of freedom; but if the first act in the train, determining and fixing the rest, be not free, none of them all can be free; as is manifest at first view, but shall be demonstrated presently.¹⁴⁵

This argument resembles closely that employed by Locke to prove that it is ridiculous to ask whether a man can will what he will, that is, whether the will can determine itself. "They who can make a question of it," said Locke, "must suppose one will to determine the acts of another, and another to determine that; and so on in infinitum."¹⁴⁶

Edwards likewise rejected another common argument for

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 20.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 21.

¹⁴⁶ *Essay*, Bk. II, chap. xxi, sec. 25.

freedom of the will, the argument from experience.¹⁴⁷ Wollaston in *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1722) had rested his case for liberty upon this contention alone. It seemed to him that all the disputes about human liberty "with which men have tired themselves and the world" were needless. "The short way of knowing," he said, whether we can act freely or not is to try.

And I am persuaded, if men would be serious, and put forth themselves, they would find by experience, that their wills are not so universally and peremptorily determined by what occurs, nor predestination and fate so rigid, but that *much* is left to their own conduct. Up and try.¹⁴⁸

Dr. Samuel Johnson, when Boswell reported to him that Edwards "puzzled" him "so much as to freedom of the human will, by stating with wonderful acute ingenuity, our being actuated by a series of motives which we cannot resist, that the only relief I had was to forget it," dismissed the matter with the remark: "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it."¹⁴⁹

Anthony Collins had in *A Philosophical Inquiry* made an elaborate refutation of the argument from experience. He admitted that the vulgar believe themselves to experience freedom. Since they repent some of their actions, they feel that they

¹⁴⁷ Two other arguments of lesser importance might be here noticed. One was the so-called argument from indifference. Defenders of liberty sometimes insisted that since the objects proposed for election were often either alike in themselves or alike in the view of the mind, the choice of one of them could not be the result of the apparent goodness of the object but must be determined by a free power within man (see Isaac Watts, *Works*, VI, 241 ff., and compare the answers of Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty*, pp. 46-52, and Edwards, *Works*, II, 35 ff.). Another argument was that men have at least the power to suspend action long enough to view carefully the paths before them. Locke used this argument to prove that men had freedom of a sort (*Essay*, Bk. II, chap. xxi, sec. 46 ff.). Here again compare Collins (pp. 38-40) with Edwards (*Works*, II, 44-45).

¹⁴⁸ London, 1726, pp. 63-64. Edwards refers to Wollaston in *The Nature of True Virtue* (*Works*, II, 276).

¹⁴⁹ *Life of Johnson* (London, 1927), II, 220-221.

could have acted otherwise than they did, a notion which is strengthened by their experience of changing their minds. Since they deliberate over some matters, they assume that their minds are often balanced in a state of indifference so that they are free to make a choice. They entertain these beliefs, however, only because they do not attend to or do not see the causes of their actions. Furthermore, they believe themselves free because they feel that they can *do* what they will, although ability to act as they will is not inconsistent with necessity. In support of his position, Collins quoted Bayle and Leibnitz.¹⁵⁰

Like Collins, Edwards rejected the argument from experience. He pointed out, to begin with, that since we experience directly only what goes on in our own minds, we can reason only from our own experience. I am conscious, he said, that I can act as I please. What causes my pleasure to be as it is I do not perceive. But it would be as foolish for me to believe that because I do not see the forces which determine my will, it determines itself as it would be to believe that since "I first found myself possessed of being, before I had knowledge of a cause of my being," I either produced myself or was created by chance.¹⁵¹

One of the most important arguments for the freedom of the

¹⁵⁰ Pp. 12-57.

¹⁵¹ *Freedom of the Will, Works*, II, 173, note. Defenders of liberty sometimes raised another point, closely related to the argument from experience. They claimed, Edwards said, that common sense supported their contentions, while necessitarians were forced to "nice, scholastic distinctions, and abstruse, metaphysical subtilties, and set those in opposition to common sense." Edwards observes that if reasoning is sound it is no confutation of it to call it metaphysical. "The question is not, whether what is said be metaphysic, logic, or mathematics, Latin, French, English or *Mohawk*? But whether the reasoning be good, and the arguments truly conclusive?" (*ibid.*, II, 171). His own exposition he insists does not depend upon "abstruse definitions or distinctions, or terms without a meaning, or of very ambiguous and undetermined signification, or any points of such abstraction and subtilty as tends to involve the attentive understanding in clouds and darkness" (*ibid.*, II, 172). The pretended demonstrations of Arminians are, however, according to him, full of "unintelligible, metaphysical phrases" (*ibid.*, II, 174). In particular he accuses Arminians of employing arguments from common sense by distorting words from their original and common use (*ibid.*, p. 135).

will, in the eyes of those who rejected the notion of necessity, was the contention that freedom was essential for morality since without it rewards and punishments were unjust. How, they asked, can a man be rightfully punished for doing what he cannot help doing? Bayle granted that this was "one of the strongest arguments alleged for the liberty of man."¹⁵² Hobbes had admitted that the objection "of greatest consequence" offered by Bramhall was that "if there be a necessity of all events . . . it will follow, that praise and reprehension, and reward and punishment, are all vain and unjust."¹⁵³ Collins, too, had noted that these "supposed inconveniencies attending the doctrine of *necessity*" were among the chief weapons in the hands of its opponents, adding that the "great EPISCOPIUS," although he had admitted that experience supported the doctrine of necessity, had rejected that doctrine because it had seemed to him subversive of "*all religion, laws, rewards, and punishments.*"¹⁵⁴ Bishop Butler seems to have expressed, then, a widespread opinion when he declared that even if the doctrine of necessity were speculatively true, practice proved it false and misleading, for it would not do to teach men that they did not deserve to be rewarded or punished.¹⁵⁵

That men will lose all sense of guilt if they are once convinced that they act as they do by necessity was emphatically asserted by those who believed that men were free. If a man commits a crime by necessity, said Samuel Fancourt, the fault

¹⁵² *Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle* (second ed., London, 1737), IV, 908.

¹⁵³ *Works*, IV, 248.

¹⁵⁴ *A Philosophical Inquiry*, pp. 22-24. Episcopus (1583-1643) was the leader of the Arminian party in Holland after the death of Arminius and was one of its most influential writers.

¹⁵⁵ A youth educated in fatalistic principles would be "insupportable to society." "Practical application" of the scheme of fatality is "absurd." "And therefore, though it were admitted that this opinion of necessity were speculatively true; yet, with regard to practice, it is as if it were false, so far as our experience reaches." (*The Analogy of Religion* [1736], Pt. I, chap. vi, secs. 5-6.)

is not his own but should be ascribed to the agent that moved him.¹⁵⁶ "No man," said Bishop Bramhall in attacking Hobbes, "blameth a fire for burning whole cities; no man taxeth poison for destroying men. . . . If the will of man be not in his own disposition, he is no more a free agent than the fire or the poison."¹⁵⁷ This contention seemed to many defenders of liberty quite unanswerable.

In meeting it, the exponents of necessity in the eighteenth century had little to say beyond what Hobbes had said in reply to it. He had argued, in the first place, that for what a man does willingly he is reasonably held blameworthy even when he acts from necessity. Since in his "scheme of fatalism" men were granted power to *do* what they will, he saw no reason why they should not be held blameworthy for evil acts. "It is enough to the judge, that the act he condemneth be voluntary."¹⁵⁸ So, too, Calvin had taught. "I deny," he wrote, "that sin is the less criminal, because it is necessary."¹⁵⁹ Sinful men find the source of evil in themselves. They sin willingly even if necessarily. They may, therefore, be justly punished.¹⁶⁰ This conclusion had been accepted by that good Calvinist, Solomon Stoddard, Edwards's grandfather and his predecessor at Northampton.¹⁶¹

A second answer offered by Hobbes to the contention that men cannot be justly punished for the things they must of

¹⁵⁶ *An Essay concerning Liberty, Grace, and Prescience* (London, 1729), p. 12.

¹⁵⁷ King, *Origin of Evil*, p. 328 n. The passage from which Bramhall's statement is taken is in Hobbes, *Works*, V, 45.

¹⁵⁸ *Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*, *Works*, V, 181. See also V, 151; IV, 252, 260.

¹⁵⁹ *Institutes*, Bk. II, chap. v, sec. 1.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, sec. 11.

¹⁶¹ *The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgment* (Northampton, 1804), p. 238. See also Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry*, pp. 93-94.

Both Calvin and Hobbes declare that man has no right to question the justice of God in punishing men who act only as he has determined them to. "Who art thou, O man, that wouldest impose laws upon God," asked Calvin (*Institutes*, Bk. II, chap. v, sec. 5). Cf. Hobbes, *Works*, IV, 249, 257, and V, 199.

necessity do was that punishment acts as a deterrent to crime. It "may, if not capital, reform the will of the offender; if capital, the will of others by example."¹⁶² Many necessitarians felt, like Bayle, that the argument that freedom was necessary to justify punishment was inconclusive, because it did not take into account the use of punishment as a corrective.

This argument for a free-will is not so strong, as it seems to be; for though men are persuaded that machines have no feeling, they will nevertheless give them a hundred blows with a hammer, when they are out of order, if they think that they may be set right by flatting a wheel, or another piece of iron. They would therefore cause a pick-pocket to be whipped, though they knew that he had no free-will, if experience had taught them that the whipping of people keeps them from committing certain actions.¹⁶³

Collins argued the point at length, citing the treatment of animals and madmen as proof that punishment is often justly employed in handling beings admittedly without free-will.¹⁶⁴

Edwards's answer to the argument that the doctrine of necessity undercut the foundations of morality was carefully elaborated. He had been considering the problem at least as early as his college days, for he had set down among the subjects to be handled in his projected "Treatise on the Mind" this one: "Concerning the prime and proper foundation of Blame."¹⁶⁵ The seriousness with which he regarded the matter is indicated by the title of his book, *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will which is supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Vertue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*.

His first reason for thinking that necessity was not incompatible with praise and blame was that God and Christ were

¹⁶² *Liberty, Necessity, and Chance, Works*, V, 181.

¹⁶³ *Dictionary*, IV, 908.

¹⁶⁴ *A Philosophical Inquiry*, pp. 91-92.

¹⁶⁵ Dwight, *Life*, p. 665.

generally considered to be necessarily good and yet deserving of praise. The argument is driven home with great vigor in the sections of his work entitled "God's Moral Excellency necessary, yet virtuous and praiseworthy" and "The Acts of the Will of the human Soul of Jesus Christ, necessarily holy, yet truly virtuous, praiseworthy, rewardable, etc."¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, according to Scripture, men whom God had determined to do evil were held blameworthy. If necessity "will prove men blameless, then Judas was blameless, after Christ had given him over, and had already declared his certain damnation."¹⁶⁷

Edwards did more, however, than merely rely on Scriptural proof. He resorted in this connection to the distinction between natural and moral necessity. He admitted that conduct resulting from natural necessity is neither praiseworthy or blameworthy, because in such conduct the motivation is from without.¹⁶⁸ But he asserted, like Calvin, Hobbes, and Collins, man's guiltiness in connection with evil acts performed by moral necessity,¹⁶⁹ on the ground that in such acts the motivation is from within; a man is doing what he wills.¹⁷⁰ In fact he contended that if the moral inability to fulfill an obligation excuses an evil act, "then wickedness always carries that in it which excuses it."¹⁷¹ According to this principle, the more wicked a man's heart is, the stronger his inclinations to evil are, the less blameworthy he is, for the less able is he to do right. Moreover, if a strong inclination to

¹⁶⁶ Pt. III, secs. 1-2.

¹⁶⁷ *Freedom of the Will, Works*, II, 95. See Pt. III, sec. 3: "The Case of such as are given up of God to Sin, and of fallen Man in general, proves moral Necessity and Inability to be consistent with blameworthiness."

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 95-96, 99 ff., 127 ff.

¹⁶⁹ Edwards made the conventional distinction between natural and moral necessity, the former being the result of purely physical causes, the latter, of moral causes, such as disposition and habit. (II, 13 ff.)

¹⁷⁰ *Freedom of the Will, Works*, II, 99. See *The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners, Works*, IV, 229.

¹⁷¹ *Freedom of the Will, Works*, II, 103.

virtue lessens a man's right to praise, then the more indifferent to good a man is, the more praiseworthy are his good actions.¹⁷² This conclusion, is, however, manifestly absurd, for "men do not think a good act to be less praiseworthy, for the agent's being much determined in it by a good inclination or a good motive, but the more."¹⁷³ The reasoning of Arminians, Edwards concluded, leads them, then, into the ridiculous position of asserting that indifference to good or evil is essential to virtue, while all good habits and inclinations are contrary to it.¹⁷⁴ He plainly had little respect for the Arminian argument that the doctrine of necessity was subversive of morality because it made punishment unjust.

It is clear that Edwards felt that he had said the last word concerning the freedom of the will. He was confident that he had set the Calvinistic theory of the will in an impregnable position, and that he had made untenable the position of Arminians on the subject. With ruthless logic he triumphantly reduced the arguments of his opponents to absurdity, remarking on one occasion, after blocking as it seemed to him all the possible avenues for eluding his conclusion, "and so the race is at an end, but the evader is taken in his flight,"¹⁷⁵ and declaring on another occasion that all the objections of Arminians to his theory were "vain and frivolous." The strength of his assurance that he had answered all possible objections to the Calvinistic theory is amusingly revealed in a statement regarding a possible "evasion" of his argument. "I confess," he wrote, "it is an evasion of my own inventing; and I do not know but I should wrong *Arminians*, in supposing that any of them should make use of it. But it being as good a one as I could invent, I would observe upon it a few things."¹⁷⁶ He believed that he had undermined the position of his foes by proving their arguments to be full of inconsistencies. Concerning what he regarded as a damaging contradiction

¹⁷² *Freedom of the Will, Works*, II, 132.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 110 ff.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 120.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, II, 133.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 51.

in the writings of Dr. Chubb, he said that it "at once utterly abolishes the Doctor's whole scheme of liberty of the will . . . at one stroke, has cut the sinews of his arguments . . . enervated and made vain all those exclamations against the doctrine of the *Calvinists*."¹⁷⁷ He could not resist declaring his triumph at the end of his work:

And really all the *Arminians* on earth might be challenged, without arrogance or vanity, to make these principles of theirs, wherein they mainly differ from their fathers, whom they so much despise, consistent with common sense; yea, and perhaps to produce any doctrine ever embraced by the blindest bigot of the church of Rome, or the most ignorant Mussulman or extravagant enthusiast, that might be reduced to more demonstrable inconsistencies, and repugnancies to common sense, and to themselves.¹⁷⁸

There were and have been many ready to agree with Edwards in his confidence that on the question of the freedom of the will he had once and for all established the Calvinistic position and destroyed that of Arminians. The younger Edwards expressed the exultant confidence of the adherents of the New Theology in the unanswerableness of his father's work:

On the great subject of *Liberty* and *Necessity*, Mr. Edwards made very important improvements. Before him, the *Calvinists* were nearly driven out of the field, by *Arminians*, *Pelagians*, and *Socinians*. . . . The Calvinists themselves began to be ashamed of their own cause and to give it up, so far at least as relates to liberty and necessity. . . . But Mr. Edwards put an end to this seeming triumph of those, who were thus hostile to that system of doctrines. . . . Now, therefore, the Calvinists find themselves placed upon firm and high ground. They fear not the attacks of their opponents. They face them on the ground of reason, as well as of Scripture. They act not merely on the defensive. Rather they have carried the war into Italy, and to the very gates of Rome.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* ¹⁷⁸ *Works*, II, 181. ¹⁷⁹ *Works* (Boston, 1854), I, 481-484.

Foster, who probably understood the Edwardean movement better than any other historian of it, thought it not too much to say that Edwards by his work on the will had brought New England theology back to Calvinism.¹⁸⁰ The importance of Edwards's book in the eyes of Calvinists may be judged from the fact that it was used as the text in moral philosophy at that Calvinistic stronghold, Yale, until 1775.¹⁸¹

THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF MAN

At the conclusion of the *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards confidently declared his belief that by "clearing and establishing the Calvinistic doctrine in this point" he had knocked out the supports upon which the Arminian theology rested and had invalidated the most important objections urged by Arminians against the Calvinistic system. Among the doctrines which were, as he saw it, bolstered by his argument for necessity was the doctrine of "the total depravity and corruption of man's nature," the doctrine that man "is wholly under the power of sin, and . . . utterly unable, without the interposition of sovereign grace . . . to do any thing that is truly good."¹⁸²

Edwards's argument in the *Freedom of the Will* furnished support for this doctrine in two ways. In the first place, it answered the chief objection to it. Those who opposed the theory of total depravity were wont to say that if, as Calvinists insisted, man were so corrupt by nature that he was utterly unable to do anything but evil, he could not be held responsible for his wickedness. No one, they said, can be blamed for doing what he cannot help doing. They pointed out, in short, that in preaching the doctrine of total depravity Cal-

¹⁸⁰ *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago, 1907), p. 77.

¹⁸¹ *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, ed. by Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New York, 1901), II, 349, and III, 361.

¹⁸² *Works*, II, 177.

vinists were overreaching themselves: instead of establishing man's sinfulness, they established his guiltlessness.¹⁸³ Edwards felt that his argument in the *Freedom of the Will* for the blameworthiness of necessary acts on the ground that such acts were voluntary relieved the doctrine of total depravity of the weight of this objection.¹⁸⁴

But the *Freedom of the Will* did more in support of the doctrine than clear away objections to it. It provided, in the second place, a solid base upon which positive argument for the corruption of human nature might be built. Nothing was insisted upon more strongly in that book than that volitional acts must have causes. According to Edwards, it would not do to say merely that the cause of an act of the will was a previous determination of the will, for this would involve the assumption that each decision of the mind was the result of an antecedent choice, an assumption manifestly absurd since somewhere there must have been a first act of the will. This first act, and all succeeding acts, must be, he argued further, determined by the natural disposition of the agent to find some things agreeable and others disagreeable. This disposition cannot be the result of choice. It must be inborn. To suppose it the result of choice would be to posit another chain of volitional cause and effect, which would logically have to be carried back at last to a decision dependent upon the inborn temper of the agent.

Thus the question arose: with what dispositions do men come into the world? Edwards's answer was unequivocal. On the basis of his argument against the freedom of the will, he affirmed uncompromisingly the Calvinistic belief that men enter this life totally depraved—enter it with dispositions that make them wholly unable of themselves either to do good or to avoid evil.

¹⁸³ See for example, Samuel Webster, *The Winter Evening's Conversation Vindicated* (Boston, 1758), p. 13: "Such a *Fountain of Sin* in us, as necessarily, or as wholly disinclines and disables to all good, I do not hold. . . . For what is necessary can't be sinful."

¹⁸⁴ *Works*, II, 177-178.

There were many, of course, who found this harsh view of human nature too bitter a pill to swallow. One of the most influential spokesmen of this group in Edwards's days was the English divine John Taylor, whose book, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to a Free and Candid Examination*, created at its publication in 1738 a great stir in religious circles. It furnished objectors to the doctrine of total depravity with what seemed to them quite unanswerable arguments against it and aroused its defenders to battle. Taylor contended that as a result of Adam's sin men were subject to sorrow, labor, and physical death, but that they were not thereby made guilty of sin, not totally corrupted.¹⁸⁵ "We may *suffer* by their Sin [that is, the sin of Adam and Eve], and actually do *suffer* by it; but we are not *punished* for their Sin, because we are not *guilty* of it."¹⁸⁶ Taylor examined in detail the proofs offered in the Larger Catechism for the proposition that the Fall resulted in "the corruption of his [man's] Nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all Evil, and that continually," and he declared, "I shall not scruple to say, this Proposition in the *Assembly's Catechism* is false."¹⁸⁷ In fact, he asserted that men were in no worse a moral state than Adam was at his creation.¹⁸⁸ Like Adam, they had no "natural propensity," no "necessary inclination" to sin.¹⁸⁹

To this frank and vigorous attack on the doctrine of total depravity several important English divines replied. One of them was the mild Calvinist Isaac Watts. Watts believed that "we have just reason to conclude, there is some original and universal degeneracy spread over the whole race of men from their birth" so that "though by reason of his natural faculties [man] may have a remote and speculative sufficiency of natural power to obey his Maker's law, yet he has no proximate and practical, or moral sufficiency to perform it, by reason of the

¹⁸⁵ P. 25.¹⁸⁶ P. 21.¹⁸⁷ Pp. 100-125.¹⁸⁸ Pp. 184 ff.¹⁸⁹ Pp. 186 ff.

perverse and sinful bias of his will and affections, and the weak influences of understanding, reason, and conscience. . . ."¹⁹⁰ Watts published his views in *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind* (1740), to which Taylor replied in great detail in 1746.

At this point John Wesley entered the controversy. He wrote partly in defense of Watts, but chiefly in opposition to Taylor. As an Arminian he believed in the freedom of the will, but he considered Taylor's doctrine dangerously subversive of evangelical faith because it gave too small a place to God's grace in the regeneration of men.¹⁹¹

Some time before Wesley's reply to Taylor was published, the controversy over the doctrine of original sin had spread to New England. In 1757 Samuel Webster, pastor at Salisbury, Massachusetts, published anonymously a tract entitled *A Winter Evening's Conversation upon the Doctrine of Original Sin*, which became the center of an exciting controversy. Webster, who, it is plain, was deeply indebted to Taylor, did not believe that men are born depraved. Infants, he said, are "as blameless as helpless."¹⁹² Webster's book called forth a reply from the Reverend Peter Clark, pastor at Salem Village, now Danvers, Massachusetts. Clark called his work *A Summer Morning's Conversation* (1758).¹⁹³ Webster defended himself in *The Winter Evening's Conversation Vindicated* (1758). Clark thought it necessary to write *A Defense of the Principles of the Summer Morning's Conversation* (1760) and took the offensive again in his *Answer to the Winter Evening's Conversation Vindicated*. Meanwhile other writers came into the fray. Charles Chauncy took Webster's side in *The Opinion of One that Has Perused the Summer Morning's Conversation* (1758). Whereupon Clark

¹⁹⁰ *Works* (London, 1811), VI, 74-75.

¹⁹¹ *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, *Works* (ed. John Emory), V, 492.

¹⁹² Quoted by Walker, *A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States*, p. 274.

¹⁹³ The full title was *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Stated and Defended. A Summer Morning's Conversation between a Minister and a Neighbor. A Reply to a Winter Evening's Conversation.*

paused long enough in his thumping of Webster to attack Chauncy in *Remarks on a Late Pamphlet, entitled the Opinion* (1758).

Among the replies provoked by Webster's book was an anonymous dialogue by Edwards's friend and disciple Joseph Bellamy. Writing in 1758, the stormiest year of the controversy, Bellamy announced that Edwards was soon to publish a defense of the doctrine of original sin.¹⁹⁴

The work to which Bellamy referred appeared in the same year with the title: *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended; Evidences of its Truth Produced, and Arguments to the Contrary Answered, containing in Particular, A Reply to the Objections and Arguings of Dr. John Taylor, in his Book, entitled, "The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination, etc."* Although Edwards published in the midst of the debate over Webster's book, he made no reference to it, unless the phrase in the preface, "Dr. Taylor, and other opposers of the Doctrine of Original Sin," be assumed to include him. It is likely that Edwards had finished his work before Webster's appeared.¹⁹⁵ It may be, on the other hand, that he thought it useless to attack Webster since the latter had obviously done little more than parrot Taylor. It was to Taylor that Edwards turned his attention. Taylor's book, said Edwards, had "made a great noise." He wrote, "I have closely attended to Dr. Taylor's *Piece on Original Sin*, in all its Parts, and have endeavored that no one thing there said, of any consequence in this Controversy, should pass unnoticed, or that any thing which has the appearance of an Argument, in opposition to this Doctrine, should be left unanswered." At the same time he revealed his intention of making his work "a *general* Defense of that great important Doctrine"—original sin.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ See Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

¹⁹⁵ The preface to Edwards's work bears the date May 26, 1757.

¹⁹⁶ *Works*, II, 307.

In most respects the book was a lucid and emphatic statement of the conventional arguments for the doctrine of total depravity. Edwards began, as Wesley did a bit later, by asserting that the universal and complete corruption of human nature was a fact easily demonstrated from history and observation. "All Mankind," he wrote, "do constantly, in all Ages, without Fail in any one Instance, run into that moral Evil, which is, in Effect, their own utter and eternal Perdition, in a total Privation of God's Favor, and Suffering of his Vengeance and Wrath."¹⁹⁷ From this fact he drew the conclusion that men are born with an irresistible tendency toward sin. Only in this way can universal sinfulness be accounted for.¹⁹⁸ Now this complete depravity of the race must have a cause. It can be explained satisfactorily only by assuming it to be the result of Adam's transgression.

But Edwards did more than brilliantly elaborate the usual Calvinistic position. He could not consider a subject deeply without contributing something to the discussion of it. At two points he made contributions to the debate concerning original sin, one of them being among his most important legacies to New England theology.

The first was a bold reinterpretation of the doctrine of the "imputation" of Adam's sin and guilt to his posterity. "All mankind," reads the Larger Catechism, "descending from him [Adam] by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression." Objectors to this doctrine declared that sin was a personal matter, that Adam therefore could not have contracted it for us.¹⁹⁹ Webster, in his vindica-

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 309. Cf. Calvin's statement: "Let us hold this, then, as an undoubted truth, which no opposition can ever shake—that the mind of man is so completely alienated from the righteousness of God, that it conceives, desires, and undertakes every thing that is impious, perverse, base, impure, and flagitious; that his heart is so thoroughly infected by the poison of sin, that it cannot produce any thing but what is corrupt. . . ." (*Institutes*, Bk. II, chap. v, sec. 19.)

¹⁹⁸ *Works*, II, 317 ff.

¹⁹⁹ *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin* (third ed., Belfast, 1746), p. 288.

tion of *A Winter Evening's Conversation* (1758) summarized the objection tartly. According to Calvinists, said he, "we were all made in Adam, five thousand Years before we were made at all."²⁰⁰

Edwards realized, of course, the force of this objection, and countered it by a daring theory of identity according to which it was possible to regard the human race as so much a unit that Adam's sin was literally the sin of all his descendants.

He began by observing that the objection against the theory of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity was founded "on a false hypothesis, and wrong notion of what we call *sameness* or *oneness*, among created things."²⁰¹ Some things which on first consideration appear entirely distinct are seen upon more careful observation to be united according to an established law of nature in such a way that together they form a single whole.²⁰²

Edwards moved on then to the assertion that the established law of nature which was the basis of identity through successive moments of time depended wholly upon the "sovereign will and agency of God." He argued that the present existence of a created substance must be the result of the immediate exercise of a divine creative power, for it can not be the effect of its existence in the past, the latter being "no active cause, but wholly a passive thing." The continuous existence of a created substance is, then, in each successive moment, a new effect of God's power. The sameness of created things must, it follows, depend wholly upon the "*arbitrary* constitution of the Creator." Thus man's personal identity, his sameness through successive moments of time, depends wholly on the will of God.²⁰³

Edwards concluded that there was no reason in the nature of things why God should not have determined arbitrarily that the

²⁰⁰ P. 27.

²⁰¹ *Works*, II, 486.

²⁰² *Ibid.* Edwards was here no doubt indebted to Locke, to whom he refers a little later in the passage. See Locke's *Essay*, Bk. II, chap. xxvii, secs. 3-5.

²⁰³ *Works*, II, 487 ff.

human race should be one (even as he determines that individuals shall preserve their identity through successive moments of time), should have, indeed, such a oneness that Adam's fall involved all of his posterity in sin and guilt, even as a man's sinning today involves his guilt tomorrow.²⁰⁴

If this notion be granted, he wrote, the Arminian objection to the doctrine of original sin on the ground that men could not reasonably be held responsible for a sin committed five thousand years before they lived, that they could not be corrupted by a sin which they did not themselves commit, falls to the ground.²⁰⁵

Edwards's second contribution to the discussion concerning original sin grew out of facing another objection to the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his descendents. The objection was that this theory made God the author of sin. One argument which Dr. Taylor "greatly insists upon," wrote Edwards, "is, 'That this does in effect charge him, who is *the author of our nature, who formed us in the womb*, with being the *author of a sinful corruption of nature.*'"²⁰⁶

In answering this exception to his doctrine, Edwards proposed an explanation of what happened to man at the Fall which made it possible to avoid the inconvenience of implying any exertion on God's part of a positive corrupting influence on men. God created Adam, said Edwards, with two sets of principles: a natural principle of self-love and a supernatural principle of benevolence. When Adam fell, God withdrew the supernatural impulse toward benevolence and left man given over wholly to those principles inherent in mere human nature, that is, the impulses growing out of self-love. Thus God, he said, did not "infuse" or "implant" any sin in human nature. He merely withdrew the gracious influences that prevented it.²⁰⁷

The feature of chief interest perhaps in this position was the implication that the depravity of man consisted in his being

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 490-491.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 476.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 490-493.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 476-478.

moved after the Fall wholly by motives of self-interest. To put it another way, Edwards was asserting that man is wholly selfish. In proposing this notion Edwards involved himself in one of the most exciting controversies of his time. Of the making of books on the subject there had been since the time of Hobbes almost no end.

"I put for a general inclination of all mankind," said Hobbes in the *Leviathan*, "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."²⁰⁸ "Every man," he wrote in a passage to which Cumberland strenuously objected, "is desirous of what is good for him, and shuns what is evil . . . and this he doth by a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward."²⁰⁹ He insisted that men are not naturally social. They do not seek society for its own sake, but only to "receive some honour or profit from it." "All society therefore is either for gain, or for glory; that is, not so much for love of our fellows, as for the love of ourselves."²¹⁰

Another striking champion of the notion that men are naturally governed wholly by self-love was Mandeville. Like Hobbes he reduced all social impulses to selfishness. "Generous Notions concerning the natural Goodness of Man are hurtful as they tend to mislead, and are merely Chimerical: The truth of this latter I have illustrated by the most obvious Examples in History. I have spoken of our Love of Company and Aversion to Solitude, examin'd thoroughly the various Motives of them, and made it appear that they all center in Self-Love."²¹¹ If, said

²⁰⁸ *Works*, III, 85-86. In the *Freedom of the Will* (1754), *Works*, II, 142, Edwards says that he had not read Hobbes. Familiar as he was with the work of men like Hutcheson, Bishop Butler, Samuel Clarke, and Shaftesbury, not to mention others, he must have known Hobbes's position. In fact he refers to Hobbes in the notes on "The Mind," written while he was still at Yale (Dwight, *Life*, p. 724).

²⁰⁹ *Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society*, *Works*, II, 8. (This work was a translation made by Hobbes in 1651 of his *Elementa Philosophica de Cive*, 1641.)

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 3-5.

²¹¹ *The Fable of the Bees* (ed. F. B. Kaye, Oxford, 1924), I, 343-344.

Mandeville, "it be urg'd, that if there are not, it is possible that there might be" people not moved by self-love, "I answer that it is as possible that Cats, instead of killing Rats and Mice, should feed them, and go about the House to suckle and nurse their young ones; or that a Kite should call the Hens to their Meat, as the Cock does, and sit brooding over their Chickens instead of devouring 'em; but if they should all do so, they would cease to be Cats and Kites; it is inconsistent with their Natures, and the Species of Creatures which we now mean, when we name Cats and Kites, would be extinct as soon as that could come to pass."²¹²

At one point in his thinking, then, Edwards fits into the tradition of which Hobbes and Mandeville are the most significant representatives. Like them, he believed that all men are naturally motivated only by self-love.

His affinity with Mandeville in this respect is, however, much more striking than his agreement with Hobbes. Hobbes had concluded that since by nature men were wholly selfish, their endeavors to preserve themselves were just and right. Furthermore, "because it is vain for a man to have a right to the end, if the right to the necessary means be denied him," he must be allowed the right to do what is necessary for his own preservation. But who is to decide what is necessary for each individual's preservation? Hobbes answered that "by right of nature" each man must be allowed to be his own judge in this respect. Consequently, he concluded, every man in "the bare

Mandeville's *Fable* was first published as an octosyllabic verse satire in 1705, entitled *The Grumbling Hive; or, Knaves Turned Honest*. In 1714 it was reissued with a prose commentary as *The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Public Benefits*. Although there is no evidence that Edwards read Mandeville, he could not have been unaware of Mandeville's theories. He knew well Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. . . . *In which the Principles of Shaftesbury are . . . defended against . . . the Fable of the Bees* (1725). He read, no doubt soon after its publication, Berkeley's *Alciphron* (1732), with its withering attack on Mandeville in the second dialogue (see "Catalogue of Books").

²¹² *Fable*, I, 134.

state of nature," that is, before men are united by compacts in society, has a right to do what he thinks fit and to possess himself of what he can.²¹³ The state of war which such a system would produce would, however, defeat the desires of men for self-preservation. Moved, therefore, by fear for their own safety, men make contracts which involve giving up some of their rights for the sake of securing peace.²¹⁴ It is plain that to Hobbes acting from self-interest was no sin. That men are moved wholly by self-love seemed to him no reproach upon human nature. In this respect, Edwards differed radically from him. Like Hobbes, he believed that men naturally act only from motives of self-interest; but unlike him, he saw in this fact an overwhelming evidence of men's depravity.

For this reason, Edwards was in closer agreement with Mandeville than with Hobbes. Mandeville did see in men's complete selfishness an evidence of their natural viciousness. He assumed, to begin with, that self-denial was essential to virtue, and applying this standard he found no virtue in the world. All human actions, he discovered, sprang from self-love. As Professor Kaye puts it: "From the standpoint, therefore, of his rigoristic formula, everything was vicious."²¹⁵ Here he and Edwards were in complete agreement.

But it will not do to assume that this agreement reveals any real spiritual affinity between the two men. Temperamentally they were poles apart. To Mandeville, says Professor Kaye, "Wicked or not, the world was a good place."²¹⁶ To Edwards, on the other hand, the world was the gloomy ruins of paradise, and man who inhabited it "a little wretched, despicable creature; a worm, a mere nothing, and less than nothing."²¹⁷ Mandeville accepted mankind as he found it gladly; Edwards regarded a depraved humanity with loathing.

²¹³ *Philosophical Rudiments, Works*, II, 8-10.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 11 ff.

²¹⁵ Bernard Mandeville, *Fable* (ed. F. B. Kaye), I, xlviii.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 405.

²¹⁷ *Works*, IV, 236.

THE NATURE OF TRUE VIRTUE

Edwards's depressing picture of a totally corrupt, because completely selfish, mankind becomes even more gloomy when viewed against the background of his theory of virtue, for after declaring that men act by nature only from motives of self-love, he announced that virtue must be defined as disinterested benevolence, a doctrine he elaborated in the posthumously published *Nature of True Virtue*.

This definition of virtue, said Edwards, is "generally allowed, not only by Christian divines, but by the more considerable deists."²¹⁸ No intelligent reader in Edwards's day who was at all familiar with English sermonic literature since the time of the Restoration and with the moralists of the period would have challenged this assertion. The notion had been strongly urged in Cumberland's *De Legibus Naturae* (1672).²¹⁹ Hutcheson, writing a half century later, had felt it not too much to say that "*All mankind agree*" that virtue consists in disinterested benevolence.²²⁰ In Edwards's day even writers whom he had strenuously opposed in the *Freedom of the Will* and in *Original Sin*, Taylor and Chubb, divine and deist, were at this point in agreement with him.²²¹

The assumption that benevolence was the foundation of virtue was consistent with Edwards's view of the place of the affections as compared with reason in human economy. He had defended the emotionalism of the Great Awakening on the ground that the affections as the springs of action were the

²¹⁸ *Works*, II, 262.

²¹⁹ Trans. by John Maxwell (London, 1727), pp. 16, 20, 41, 47, 345.

²²⁰ *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London, 1725), p. 179. See also pp. 150, 153.

²²¹ Edwards quoted Taylor on the point in *Original Sin*, *Works*, II, 383. See Chubb, *Tracts*, pp. 440-444. For evidence of the commonness of the doctrine among English latitudinarian divines long before its announcement by Shaftesbury or his follower Hutcheson, see R. S. Crane, "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" *Journal of English Literary History*, I, 208-213 (1934).

essential elements of true religion. He had presented as a prominent postulate in the *Freedom of the Will* the statement that the will could not be distinguished from the affections. He had laid down as a principal argument for the depravity of man the proposition that natural man was completely under the control of the self-regarding affections. He was, then, perfectly consistent when he declared that virtue was a matter of the affections and that the virtuous man was one dominated by the good passion—benevolence.

There were those in his day who saw reason as the foundation of virtue and as its proper measure. "The height of Virtue," Henry More had said, "is this, constantly to pursue that which to Right Reason seems best."²²² "I proceed, every where, upon this Principle," wrote Richard Fiddes in 1724, "that Reason is the proper Rule of human Judgement, and Action."²²³ This, too, was the principle assumed as basic by Wollaston in *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1726).²²⁴ And Isaac Watts declared in 1730 that "it is still Reason exercising itself, and judging of the Fitness and Unfitness of Things, by and according to these native and essential Principles of Reasoning which I have spoke of, that is the only Rule or Test of *what is Vice* and *what is Virtue*."²²⁵

Such a position was wholly uncongenial to Edwards. Virtue, he said, was founded not upon reason but upon a spiritual sense, that is, upon affection.²²⁶ This position is made clear in the beginning of *The Nature of True Virtue*, where he laid down the principle that virtue is a kind of beauty, not the "beauty of understanding and speculation" but of "the *disposition and will*."²²⁷ Virtue, according to Edwards, is not the triumph of

²²² *An Account of Virtue*, p. 15.

²²³ *A General Treatise of Morality* (London, 1724), p. 398.

²²⁴ "To be governed by reason is the general law imposed by the Author of nature upon them, whose uppermost faculty is reason . . ." (p. 51).

²²⁵ *Philosophical Essays on Various Subjects*, fourth edition (London, 1732), pp. 111 f.

²²⁶ *Works*, II, 301.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 383.

reason over the passions, but of the good passions over the evil ones, or, to speak more specifically, of benevolence over self-love. Sin is the ascendancy of the evil passion, self-love, over the good passion, benevolence.

Now the moralists who, like Edwards, upheld the exalted standard of virtue implied in defining it as disinterested benevolence were likely to find themselves confronted by an embarrassing problem. On what grounds could they urge men to be virtuous? If they pointed out as motives to benevolence the usefulness to society and so indirectly to the individual himself of benevolent acts, they could be accused of placing themselves in the slippery position of attempting to persuade men to be unselfish for selfish reasons. And if they succeeded in this attempt, they could be charged with having really failed. It could be said, in short, that in trying to make men benevolent, they had really made them selfish, because they had made benevolence issue out of a fundamental selfishness. This was in fact the charge advanced against Cumberland. Such a scheme as his, said his translator, lies open to the criticism that virtue has been degraded to a profitable good.²²⁸

Many moralists of the time did not hesitate from practical considerations to make this appeal. Gay, in the "Preliminary Dissertation concerning the Fundamental Principles of Virtue and Morality," stated quite frankly that the motive of self-love is the proper impulse toward virtue. "*Obligation*," he declared, "*is the necessity of doing or omitting any Action in order to be happy.*"²²⁹ Edmund Law in his attack on Mandeville, *Remarks upon a Late Book Entitled the Fable of the Bees* (1724),²³⁰ said that the pleasure which accompanied a good act did not make it less virtuous than it would otherwise have been—that, in brief, self-

²²⁸ *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature* (1727), Appendix, pp. 46 ff. English translation by John Maxwell of Cumberland's *De Legibus Naturae Disquisitio Philosophica* (1672).

²²⁹ *Essay concerning the Origin of Evil* (1732), p. xxxvi.

²³⁰ Ed. by F. D. Maurice (Cambridge, 1894), pp. 32–35.

denial (which Mandeville had assumed to be essential to virtue) was not really a necessary ingredient of it. He went on to explain that in the creation of man there was such a wise union of body and soul that when the mind is delighted, the individual experiences a pleasant agitation of the spirits and the blood. The pleasure of virtue is thus justified by nature.

Such an attitude could not, however, satisfy the more idealistic moralists. Yet how were they to avoid basing unselfishness upon self-love? Maxwell in his appendix to the translation (1727) of Cumberland's *Laws of Nature* revealed a way that had been found out of the difficulty. Virtue, he said, may be presented either as beneficial or as beautiful, that is, either as a means or as an end. With great shrewdness, he analyzed the difficulties involved in each position. Those who appeal to self-love by presenting the hope of reward and the fear of punishment are accused of revealing a despicably mercenary spirit. Those who, on the other hand, insist upon a disinterested love are called enthusiasts. His own opinion was that the second position is more admirable, but that the first must often be employed because of the baseness of human nature.²³¹

Maxwell named Hutcheson and Shaftesbury as proponents of the nobler view. Hutcheson, to whom Edwards often refers and who plainly influenced him profoundly, set forth sharply in *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) these two contrasting views of the motives to virtue. He admitted that "the greatest part of our later Moralists" hold it undeniable that morality is established by the law of a superior power, and is supported by sanctions of reward and punishment, which determine men to obedience from motives of self-interest.²³² Some other moralists, Hutcheson added, suppose an "*immediate natural Good* in the Actions call'd *Virtuous*; that is, 'That we are determin'd to perceive some

²³¹ Pp. 66-68.

²³² This is Cumberland's position.

Beauty in the Actions of others, and to love the Agent, even without reflecting upon any *Advantage* which can any way redound to us from the Action; that we have also a secret sense of Pleasure accompanying such of our Actions as we call *Virtuous*, even when we expect no other *Advantage* from them.’”²³³

The chief purpose of *An Inquiry* was to state the latter position convincingly. In attempting to do this, Hutcheson tried to prove that men have a moral sense, sense being defined as a “Determination of our Minds to receive Ideas independently on our Will, and to have Perceptions of Pleasure and Pain.”²³⁴ By this sense men perceive the excellence of a virtuous act even when the act offers no advantage to them. In establishing this point, Hutcheson took two steps. First he proved that men have a sense, the internal sense he called it, by which they find pleasure in the contemplation of forms having regularity and order and harmony. Now, he argued, if the existence of this sense be granted, as he thought it must be, it should not be difficult to admit the existence of another, superior sense consisting in a determination to be pleased in the presence of moral beauty—the beauty not of inanimate things harmoniously arranged, but of actions, characters, affections in which regularity and order are observable. This second sense he called the moral sense. Thus did Hutcheson avoid the embarrassing position of those who urged men to be unselfish for selfish reasons. Virtue is to be pursued not because it is useful, but because it is beautiful, not as a means but as an end. Furthermore, the moral sense may be the basis by which men come to approve and to embrace virtue; there is, therefore, no need to believe that self-love is the only possible drive to virtuous action. The moral

²³³ P. 105. For references by Edwards to Hutcheson see Edwards’s *Works*, II, 292, 304, 382–383. The “Catalogue of Books” contains four references to Hutcheson.

²³⁴ This definition is taken from *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* . . . (1728), p. 4, but it fits exactly the discussion of the internal sense and the moral sense in *An Inquiry*.

sense, like all other senses, is wholly beyond the influence of self-interest. Perception is independent of the will and the affections.

Much the same high tone had been taken earlier by Shaftesbury, to whom Maxwell had also referred in his criticism of Cumberland's employment of the profit motive in ethics.²³⁵ In setting forth the necessity for appealing to the nobler motives to virtue, that is, the motives above self-love, Shaftesbury attempted, as Hutcheson was to do more systematically later, to establish the intrinsic value of virtue as a kind of beauty. He believed that there was a beauty in moral matters paralleling the beauty of physical forms but superior to it. Virtue, then, according to Shaftesbury, "is it-self no other than the Love of Order and Beauty in Society."²³⁶ The convincing presentation of this proposition that virtue appealed to men by its inherent loveliness, a loveliness analogous in character and effect to that of the physical forms which we call beautiful, was, Shaftesbury said, the chief purpose of the *Characteristics*.²³⁷

It is against this background of discussion that Edwards's opening statement in *The Nature of True Virtue* must be seen: "Whatever controversies and variety of opinions there are about the nature of virtue, yet all (excepting some skeptics, who deny any real difference between virtue and vice) mean by it, something *beautiful*, or rather some kind of *beauty*, or excellency."²³⁸ Like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, he was anxious to raise virtue above the level of self-love, to place it beyond the point where it depended upon self-love. It was

²³⁵ *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1773), II, 272. See also II, 57-58. The first edition of the *Characteristics* was in 1711. For evidence of Edwards's acquaintance with Shaftesbury, see note 236 below.

²³⁶ *Characteristics*, II, 75. See also *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

²³⁷ *Characteristics*, III, 303. Shaftesbury does point out that virtue is useful (II, 175-176, 81 ff.), but he decries pursuit of it on this ground only. For an exposition of Hutcheson's philosophy and a discussion of his relationship to Shaftesbury, see William Robert Scott, *Francis Hutcheson* (Cambridge, England, 1900).

²³⁸ *Works*, II, 261.

to be something lovely, not merely something useful. It was to be an end in itself, not a mere means of satisfying selfish desires.

That which is called *virtue*, is a certain kind of beautiful nature, form or quality that is observed in things. That form or quality is called beautiful to any one beholding it to whom it is beautiful, which appears in itself agreeable or comely to him, or the view or idea of which is immediately pleasant to the mind. I say agreeable *in itself*, and *immediately* pleasant, to distinguish it from things which in themselves are not agreeable nor pleasant, but either indifferent or disagreeable, which yet appear eligible and agreeable indirectly for something else that is the consequence of them, or with which they are connected. Such a kind of indirect agreeableness or eligibleness in things, not for themselves, but for something else, is not what is called beauty.²³⁹

Edwards, then, accepted the theory which Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had persuasively presented, namely, that the amiableness of virtue lay in its beauty rather than in its benefits.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 300.

²⁴⁰ It must not be assumed that Edwards merely became a convert to the views of Hutcheson and of his group. Not only did he differ from these men at points so important that he can hardly be regarded as a follower of the group, but he was no doubt influenced also by the Cambridge Platonists in formulating his theory of virtue. See Rufus Orlando Suter, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards* (manuscript dissertation in Harvard College Library, 1932), summarized in *Harvard University Summaries of Theses* (1933), pp. 351-353. See also, in note 44 above, references to discussions of the possible influence of the Cambridge Platonists on Edwards in connection with his early idealism. It is likely, too, that beside the influences mentioned ought to be laid that of Newtonianism, with which Edwards was familiar. (The "Catalogue of Books" contains five references to Newton's work. See also reference to Newton in the early notebooks, Dwight, *Life*, p. 678.) Edwards's mathematical calculations concerning the relative claims of God and humanity to benevolence (*Works*, II, 265-266) and his argument for a virtuous kind of self-love by analogy with the phenomena of gravitation (II, 279-280) are evidence of the influence of Newtonianism in his thinking. For a discussion of the relationship of Newtonianism and ethical theory in the eighteenth century see Herbert Drennon, *James Thomson and Newtonianism* (manuscript dissertation, University of Chicago Library, 1928), pp. 137-176.

In one respect, however, this notion failed to achieve the chief purpose for its adoption. It had been urged as proof that men may be and ought to be moved to benevolence without an appeal to self-love. And yet in stressing the beauty of virtue, its supreme loveliness, its proponents laid themselves open to attack from cynical moralists on the ground that according to this theory virtue was made to appear so attractive that men followed it to please themselves. In short, that, far from removing virtue beyond the limits of self-love, it merely stimulated a refined and subtle kind of selfishness—a selfishness rising out of the pleasures of benevolence. It was with these critics in mind, no doubt, that Hutcheson wrote with irritation: “Some *Moralists* . . . will rather twist *Self-Love* into a thousand Shapes, than allow any other Principle of Approbation than *Interest*.”²⁴¹

To this criticism, Hutcheson offered several replies. He answered, for one thing, that self-interest could not affect the operation of any sense. If then there be, as he felt he had proved beyond question, a moral *sense*, its exercises must be as unaffected as are the exercises of the other senses by selfish impulses.²⁴² A more important rejoinder, however, rested upon an analysis of the meaning of the term *self-love*. From one point of view, said Hutcheson, it is true that men pursue beauty from self-love, that is, for the pleasures they find in it, but it must be observed that in such cases a sense of moral beauty must exist antecedent to any prospect of pleasure. Unless a man first loves virtue, perceives a prospect of pleasure in the practice of it, he cannot be moved by self-love to pursue it. Thus it is wrong to assume that the pleasure of a virtuous act is the real cause of the act, and wrong to announce that because virtue gives pleasure, it is sought only from self-love.²⁴³ Men always act of course as they are pleased to act. This is merely to say that men are pleased with that which pleases them. The important question about a moral agent is *what* pleases him?

²⁴¹ *Inquiry*, p. 114.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 140–143.

Is it his own private good? Then he may properly be said to be moved by self-love. Is it the public good? In that case, he may justly be regarded as benevolent.²⁴⁴

Edwards felt it necessary to consider this matter in *The Nature of True Virtue*. "Many," he said, "assert, that all love arises from self-love. In order to determine this point, it should be clearly ascertained what is meant by self-love."²⁴⁵ He rejected as ambiguous the apparently plain definition that self-love "is a man's love of his own happiness." The term may, he went on, be taken in two very different senses. It may be used to designate a man's love for his own private, separate happiness. In this sense the term is properly employed. But it is often used to denote man's general capacity for happiness, that is, his liking what he likes and being pleased with what pleases him. In this sense, of course, all love may be resolved into self-love, "for it is undoubtedly true, that whatever a man loves, his love may be resolved into his loving what he loves—if that be proper speaking"—whether he loves his own private good or that of his neighbor. Men who love the good of humanity love what affords them pleasure, but such love cannot be called selfish. Only the pleasure arising from the pursuit of private good can justly be so designated. Furthermore, said Edwards in a passage reminiscent of Hutcheson, it must be noted that when a man finds pleasure in "the good of his neighbor," the disposition to be pleased by his neighbor's happiness was prior to the pleasure derived from gratifying it. To call such affection selfish is to confuse the effect with the cause.

Up to this point Edwards's theory of virtue was, it is plain, closely akin to that of Hutcheson. At two points, however, Edwards found objections to Hutcheson's scheme. In the first place, he felt that Hutcheson and others near him in theory were

²⁴⁴ See Thomas Chubb, *A Collection of Tracts*, p. 439; Bishop Joseph Butler, *Works*, I, 16–17, and 139–140.

²⁴⁵ *Works*, II, 277.

guilty of giving too little place in their systems to man's obligations to the Deity. "There seems to be an inconsistency in some writers on morality, in this respect, that they do not wholly exclude a regard to the *Deity* out of their schemes of morality, but yet mention it so slightly, that they leave me room and reason to suspect they esteem it a less important and a subordinate part of true morality. . . ."²⁴⁶

In support of his assertion that the supreme concern of the virtuous man is the Deity, that to the Deity should the greatest

²⁴⁶ *Nature of Virtue, Works*, II, 267, 271. Hutcheson does say that love to God is the highest obligation of man (*Inquiry*, pp. 24, 64, 77) but there is no doubt that he tended toward a secular ethics. The same might be said of Cumberland. See *Laws of Nature*, pp. 16-21. It should be observed that Edwards resisted the drift of eighteenth-century ethics toward Utilitarianism, a drift to which Cumberland and Hutcheson gave impulse and which eventuated in the system of J. S. Mill. As Rufus Suter puts it, Edwards's theories stand opposed to the belief that "mistakes the material welfare of the people as a whole for the highest moral good; and mistakes the proclivity of an act to beget this universal welfare for true virtue" ("The Conception of Morality in the Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards," *Journal of Religion*, XIV, 266-267, July, 1934). Approaching the question from another point of view, Joseph Haroutunian declares that "as seen from the perspective of the theology of Edwards, the history of the New England Theology is the history of a degradation. It declined because its theocentric character, its supreme regard for the glory of God and His sovereignty over man, made it ill-fitted to give expression to the ideals of the eighteenth century New England and to meet its immediate social needs. The social and political forces of the time gave rise to principles which were either inimical or irrelevant to the spirit of the Edwardean theology" (*Piety Versus Moralism*, New York, 1932, p. xxii). Over against this belief may be set that of Williston Walker, who says that Edwards's doctrines were "effective in giving a basis for philanthropy" (*Ten New England Leaders*, New York, 1901, p. 256).

Edwards does make the "beauty of order in society, besides what consists in benevolence," a beauty of a "secondary kind" (II, 275), and he puts benevolence toward men below love of God (II, 266 ff.), but he certainly had no desire to cause men to slight their duty toward their fellows. In fact, he asserts emphatically that "Christian practice" is "the chief of all signs" of a true religion (II, 182-228, and note 25 above). He felt, no doubt, that by attaching the obligations of men to exercise good will toward humanity, even as a secondary matter, to their obligations to love God, he had exalted the virtue of interest in the common good far above its position at the head of any secular ethics. His series of sermons on *Charity and its Fruits* (ed. T. Edwards, 1851) is evidence of his interest in man's obligation to man. Our age is perhaps too ready to condemn the Puritans as indifferent to humanitarian concerns.

share of a good man's benevolence be directed, Edwards laid down two principles for determining the degree of benevolence that men are obliged to exercise toward any being. The first rule is that benevolence should be proportioned to the extent or amount of a being's existence. He thought it proper that the "Being who has the *most* of Being, or has the greatest share of existence, other things being equal, so far as such a Being is exhibited to our faculties or set in our view, will have the *greatest* share of the propensity and benevolent affection of the heart."²⁴⁷ The second rule governing the degree of benevolence due to any being is that the greater the degree of that being's benevolence to others, the more benevolent affection he deserves. In support of this principle, Edwards said that "so far as the Being beloved has love to Being in general, so far his own Being is, as it were, enlarged, extends to, and in some sense comprehends, Being in general," so that the greater a Being's benevolence, the greater his existence and therefore, according to the first principle of benevolence, the greater his claim as a recipient of affection.²⁴⁸

It is clear on the basis of these two principles that of all beings, God is most worthy of being loved, for he has infinitely the greatest degree of existence and infinitely the most benevolence.²⁴⁹ Proceeding from this conclusion, Edwards contended that the obligation under which moral agents lie to exercise love to God had been too little stressed in the chief ethical systems of his day.²⁵⁰

There was another and much more important point at which Edwards diverged from Hutcheson and his school. This was over the question whether there was in mankind any natural

²⁴⁷ *The Nature of True Virtue*, *Works*, II, 264. See *Notes on the Mind*, *Works* (ed. Dwight), I, 698-699.

²⁴⁸ *Works*, II, 265. Cf. Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 162 ff., and Cumberland, *Laws of Nature*, p. 169 n.

²⁴⁹ *Works*, II, 265.

²⁵⁰ *Works* (New York, 1808), VIII, 281; *Works* (1858), III, 542.

impulse toward virtue.²⁵¹ Edwards's answer to this question was an unqualified denial that there was any natural disposition to benevolence in man. "Natural men," he told his congregation at Northampton, in a sermon with the significant title "Natural Men in a Dreadful Condition," "have no higher principle in their hearts than self-love."²⁵²

It is at this point that his theory of virtue and his doctrine of depravity unite to form a dreadful view of human nature. Virtue, he asserted with all the dialectical skill at his command, consists in disinterested benevolence toward Being in general; nothing rising out of self-love can by any stretch be called virtuous. Men, he declared with unhesitating assurance, are, on the other hand, given over wholly to self-love; nothing they do can have any higher origin than self-interest.²⁵³

The full force of Edwards's teaching concerning the depravity of man is felt only when that teaching is presented against the background of his exalted theory of virtue. The full enormity of that depravity in Edwards's view can be realized only by comparing man as he is, a slave to self-love, with man as he ought to be, disinterestedly benevolent.

The larger part of *The Nature of True Virtue* is taken up with the enforcing of this contrast. More than half of its eight sections are designed directly and indirectly to show that there is no virtue in natural man. After two opening chapters presenting his lofty standard of virtue, Edwards proceeds to the proof of the fact that everything in natural man having the appearance of virtue is really infinitely below it.

Now the writers who accepted the high view of moral good-

²⁵¹ By the word *natural*, Edwards meant without grace. Natural man is man as he is since the Fall when all supernatural impulses were withdrawn, leaving him with the qualities which as mere man he possesses. Cf. Hume's analysis of the various meanings of natural: 1) as opposed to miraculous, 2) as rare, 3) as opposed to artificial (*Treatise of Human Nature*, Bk. III, Pt. I, sec. 2).

²⁵² *Works* (London, 1865), II, 818. See also *Works* (ed. Dwight), I, 665, 667.

²⁵³ *Christian Love*, p. 235.

ness which made benevolence the criterion of virtue generally protested stoutly against the low view of human nature as moved only by self-love. The antagonism of these moralists to the notion that men are wholly selfish is clearly seen in the attack of one of the earliest of them, Cumberland, upon Hobbes. Hobbes, said Cumberland, asserts the monstrous doctrine that "Men are so fram'd, that it is contrary to their Nature, and, consequently, plainly *impossible, that they should desire anything but their own Advantage and their own Glory.*"²⁵⁴ Hobbes, he said, declares that men are less benevolent than animals, that they are in fact "*fiercer than Bears, Wolves, and Serpents.*"²⁵⁵ To this disparagement of human nature, he objected bitterly. Men are, he argued, physiologically fitted for benevolence, because love induces "better and more flowing Juices, brisker Spirits" in human veins, while hatred and its kindred passions clog the blood.²⁵⁶ Indeed, the "more powerful inclinations of all Mankind" carry them toward the common good.²⁵⁷ In fact, said Cumberland, nothing but madness or passion, that is, some disease of the mind, ever thwarts this natural inclination.²⁵⁸ In enforcing this point, he did not hesitate to attack Hobbes personally. I grant, he wrote, that man by abuse of his free will and by narrowness of soul may consider only himself and desire only what seems profitable to himself; but, he concluded tartly, "I could never observe any Symptoms of *such* a Will, in any Man, except in *Hobbes* only."²⁵⁹

This notion that men have powerful, although sometimes thwarted, natural impulses toward benevolence was strongly maintained by writers like Hutcheson. To many of them, as to Cumberland, the denial of this assertion seemed a monstrous injustice to the human race.²⁶⁰

Edwards, then, is in this interesting position. He combined

²⁵⁴ *Law of Nature*, p. 171.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

²⁶⁰ See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, I, 115 ff., II, 310 ff.; Hutcheson,

in one coherent system elements from two very diverse schools of thought. Like one group, of which Hutcheson is a good representative, he made virtue wholly a matter of disinterested benevolence; like another, the group in fact that men like Hutcheson most cordially disliked, he asserted that natural man is always and of necessity moved by an overwhelming contrary principle of self-love. His position is in this respect much like that of Mandeville, who insisted that self-denial was necessary to virtue but that men never naturally behave according to any other principle than self-interest.

In supporting this belief, Edwards devoted a great part of *The Nature of True Virtue* to proving that all the seemingly virtuous acts and impulses of natural man, all those that have the appearance of benevolence, lack the essential quality of this virtue. Moralists like Hutcheson had offered men's natural impulses to pity and gratitude, the love between the sexes and that between parents and children, men's sense of justice and their approbation of virtue as evidences of a disinterested love for others in mankind. Edwards accounts for all these impulses which seem to reveal a virtuous benevolence in natural man by reference to three psychological factors, none of which, he claims, has any element of true virtue.

The first of these is natural instinct. There are, argued Edwards, certain particular laws of nature which drive men to love those of the other sex, to care for their children, and to pity those in distress. These have been generously planted in men by a wise creator for the sake of their preservation and comfort in a world which since the fall of Adam is full of suffering and danger. They have in them nothing of a truly virtuous, that is, truly benevolent, quality.²⁶¹ Thus he rejected the love

Nature and Conduct of the Passions, p. 13, and *Inquiry*, pp. vii, 132, 156, 173, 195, 205, 221, 252-253. These men did not, of course, insist that men are never moved by self-love or that self-love never overcomes benevolence. They did insist, however, that men have natural impulses toward benevolence.

²⁶¹ *The Nature of True Virtue*, *Works*, II, 291 ff.

between men and women, the affection between parents and children, and pity—of which Cumberland, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson had made much—as evidence of natural benevolence.²⁶²

A second tendency in human nature which sometimes results in attitudes and behavior which seem virtuous but are not is, according to Edwards, the association of ideas. It is by reference to this that Edwards explained in large part the approbation of virtue which Hutcheson had held before his readers as evidence of a benevolent temper natural to man. Hutcheson had contended that an appreciation for the moral goodness of men not rising out of self-love was proved by our approval of and admiration for the good deeds of people in distant countries and ages, good deeds from which we could not hope to receive any benefit. We find ourselves, he said, approving of good deeds and disapproving of evil ones when there is no possibility of advantage to us or harm to us in them.

Edwards attempted to demolish this argument by an analysis of such approbation and disapprobation, designed to prove that they are simply the effect of self-love directed by the association of ideas. Things may, by the association of ideas, arouse in us a feeling of aversion or of liking, he said, even when we have no immediate prospect of pleasure or fear of pain. A child, for example, may have so strongly fixed a fear of rattlesnakes as the result of associating the idea of danger with the idea of snakes that even the picture of a snake is sufficient to arouse disgust.²⁶³ In this way, Edwards went on to say, "some vices may become in a degree odious" and some virtues may awaken admiration "by the influence of self-love, through an habitual connection of ideas of contempt" or of approval with them.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Cumberland, *Laws of Nature*, pp. 128–129; Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, II, 78, and I, 118. Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 144, 195, 215; Cf. Hume, *Treatise*, pp. 394, 481; Hobbes, *Works*, IV, 44, 49; Mandeville, *Fable* (ed. Kaye), I, 255, 259.

²⁶³ *Works*, II, 283.

²⁶⁴ *The Nature of True Virtue*, *Works*, II, 284.

A third natural disposition of men which sometimes creates feelings or behavior which have the appearance although not the quality of true virtue is an appreciation for what Edwards called the secondary kind of beauty. His argument here is a neat turning of Hutcheson's dialectic guns back upon himself. Hutcheson in attempting to establish the existence of a moral sense had, as has been pointed out, distinguished between the perception of that harmony which constitutes beauty in animate things and the appreciation of that harmony which is the essential element of beauty in inanimate objects. The perception of symmetry in inanimate things he referred to an internal sense, that of proportion in animate things to a moral sense. Seizing upon this distinction, Edwards posited a primary and a secondary kind of beauty—the primary beauty being the harmony of spiritual beings, the secondary and inferior beauty being the agreement, the proportion, the symmetry found in inanimate objects.²⁶⁵

This secondary beauty, he went on to say, appears not only in material things but in immaterial things as well. There is, for instance, a beauty in a well-ordered society that is of this sort.²⁶⁶ Now this kind of beauty is utterly different from the beauty of benevolence. A relish for it may exist without there being any real taste for the loveliness of true virtue.²⁶⁷

Furthermore, the disposition to be pleased by this secondary kind of beauty which has nothing of benevolence in it, is the basis for that natural approbation of justice, which has been used by some moralists to prove a natural benevolence in men. Justice, said Edwards, is merely the pleasing harmony between an act and its consequences.²⁶⁸ It is also, together with self-love, the ground of a seemingly virtuous gratitude, for gratitude is the just return of affection in exchange for a favor.²⁶⁹ Finally, it combines with self-love to form the basis for natural con-

²⁶⁵ *Works*, II, 271–272.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 277.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 274–275.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 275.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 281.

science. Conscience, said Edwards, is not, as Hutcheson and Butler had declared, a true virtue or a revelation of a truly virtuous disposition. We feel pleased in the consciousness of having treated someone in a way which were we in his place we should like to have him treat us, and we are uneasy in the consciousness of not having so treated him. In this sense, natural conscience is rooted in self-love, that is, our affection for ourselves is the basis of it. To this sense of the effect of our actions with respect to others in the awareness of our feeling about those actions if others performed them with respect to ourselves must be added in accounting for natural conscience another sense, that of desert. The last plainly consists in an appreciation for the secondary kind of beauty.²⁷⁰

In natural conscience, then, there is, as in love for those of the opposite sex, in affection between parents and children, in pity, in the natural approbation of virtue, in justice, no necessary element of virtue. A virtuous man may have these dispositions,²⁷¹ but they are no evidence in themselves that a man is virtuous. Above all they are no evidence of any natural inclination toward benevolence in men. They do not make it necessary to deny the doctrine of total depravity.

Of charity, or Christian love, it is peculiarly true, that it is above the selfish principle. Though all real love to others seeks the good, and espouses the interests of those who are beloved, yet all other love, excepting this, has its foundation, in one sense, in the selfish principle.

So it is with the natural affection which parents feel for their children, and with the love which relatives have one to another. If we except the impulses of instinct, self-love is the main spirit of it. It is because men love themselves, that they love those

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 287. See also Dwight, *Life*, I, 701. Cf. Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, pp. 18, 26, 40. An interesting comparison may be made between Edwards and Bishop Butler concerning natural conscience. Butler makes it the "capital part" of his ethical system (*Works*, I, 58).

²⁷¹ *Works*, II, 295 ff.

persons and things that are their own, or that they are nearly related to, and which they look upon as belonging to themselves, and which, by the constitution of society, have their interest and honor linked with their own. And so it is in the closest friendships that exist among men. Self-love is the spring whence they proceed. Sometimes natural gratitude, for good turns that have been done them by others, or for benefits received from them, disposes men, through self-love, to a similar respect to those that have shown them kindness, or by whom their self-interest has been promoted. And sometimes natural men are led into a friendship to others, from qualifications that they see or find in them, whence they hope for the promotion of their own temporal good. . . . And so there are many other ways, in which self-love is the source of that love and friendship that often arises between natural men. Most of the love that there is in the world, arises from this principle, and therefore it does not go beyond nature. And nature cannot go beyond self-love, but all that men do, is, some way or other, from this root.²⁷²

Now one objection to the Calvinistic belief in the depravity of man which these theories of Edwards's were designed to support inevitably suggests itself. Did they not by completely discrediting human nature present to men an outlook so desperately hopeless as to discourage them from all attempts at virtue? Taylor in attacking Watts's doctrine of original sin hurled against him this accusation: "He villifies and pours great Contempt upon the human Nature."²⁷³ And Taylor added that the Calvinistic doctrine by defaming human nature enfeebled men's hope and cut the nerve of ethical endeavor.²⁷⁴ When men, he declared, believe that they are worse than brutes, it is small wonder that they behave worse than brutes.²⁷⁵

And what Wonder if the Generality of Christians have been the

²⁷² *Charity and its Fruits*, a series of sermons on Christian Love delivered in Northampton, 1739, p. 226.

²⁷³ *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin*, p. 350.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231, 257.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

most wicked, lewd, bloody, and treacherous of all Mankind? Certainly nothing generous, great, good, pure can spring from Principles, to say the least, so low and groveling.²⁷⁶

This charge Edwards faced squarely in *Original Sin*. Referring specifically to Taylor, he argued, for one thing, that if we are actually depraved, "he acts but a *friendly* part to us, who endeavors fully to discover and manifest our disease."²⁷⁷ A second part of Edwards's reply to Taylor's criticism of the doctrine of original sin was much more significant. No contempt is cast by the doctrine of the total depravity of man, said Edwards, upon the noble possibilities of man.²⁷⁸ Just what noble possibilities remained to men who since the Fall are given over wholly to self-love in a world where the only virtue is disinterested benevolence Edwards made abundantly clear. Again and again he declared that although men are wholly corrupt and wholly unable of themselves to become virtuous, some of them are by the atonement of Christ and the consequent operation of supernatural and irresistible grace lifted out of their depravity.

THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE

The doctrine of grace rounds out and completes Edwards's ethical system. In the light of it, all the elements of that system fall into their proper places and reveal themselves in their just proportions. God has "absolutely determined," said Edwards in *Decrees and Elections*, that a certain number of men completely helpless of themselves to achieve virtue shall by the irresistible operation of his grace become truly good. Thus does he resolve for men the dreadful dilemma presented to them by his doctrines of depravity and virtue, doctrines that seemed to hold out no hope. Man is, it is true, given over wholly to self-love. Virtue, it is true, consists wholly in benevolence. Grace bridges the gap.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Works*, II, 503.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 502.

And it is grace alone that bridges it. Nothing that men can do is of any use in making the leap from self-love to disinterested benevolence. Against such men as Taylor, Whitby, Chubb, and Watts, some of whom asserted man's ability to raise himself to virtue and some of whom asserted man's power to place himself in a position where divine grace must raise him,²⁷⁹ Edwards declared uncompromisingly that when men become virtuous God does all, that men do nothing.²⁸⁰

According to Edwards, virtue cannot be cultivated. It cannot be developed by repeated good choices. Here again he falls back upon his favorite argument in the *Freedom of the Will*. Each virtuous volition of an agent must proceed either from a preceding virtuous choice or be immediately imparted to the agent. Now every good choice cannot have its origin in an antecedent act of the will, for there must somewhere be a first act from which all others spring. This first act, which by definition cannot spring from a previous choice, must result from impulses external to the agent's will. Edwards concluded, then, that virtue could not be cultivated by repeated acts of choice. It must "take its rise from creation or infusion by God."²⁸¹ No truly virtuous acts are begotten, said Edwards, before the marriage of God and the soul. "Seeming virtues and good works before, are not so indeed. They are a spurious brood, being bastards, and not children."²⁸² "All moral good is from God."²⁸³

In Edwards's view of human nature, then, God's "efficacious, determining grace" in the lives of those whom he has from all

²⁷⁹ Whitby, *A Discourse*, p. 26; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, pp. 148 ff. (Watts presents very clearly—pp. 165 ff.—the Arminian, the Calvinistic, and his own compromise view, labeling them A, C, and R); for a discussion of the controversy over the matter in New England, see Walker, *Ten New England Leaders*, pp. 303 ff.

²⁸⁰ See Edwards's attack on Taylor at this point (*Works*, II, 463) and on Whitby (*ibid.*, II, 534 ff.); also II, 549.

²⁸¹ *Efficacious Grace*, *Works*, II, 569.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, II, 597.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, II, 578.

eternity decreed shall receive it, is the cause, the only possible cause, of virtue.²⁸⁴

This doctrine forms the pinnacle of the philosophical and theological system which Edwards skillfully and patiently built. With great architectural skill, he reared a carefully proportioned and buttressed, if not completely consistent, structure composed both of notions inherited from the Calvinistic tradition and of materials boldly seized from the philosophical systems current in his day. At its base he laid the psychological theories announced at the time of the Great Awakening and proclaimed in his controversies over the freedom of the will. Upon these he erected solidly his doctrine of depravity and his doctrine of virtue, enunciated in his controversies over these subjects. At the apex of the whole he set his doctrine of grace.

The whole edifice was designed to make evident the majestic power of God. "It is manifest," wrote Edwards in the opening sentence of *Efficacious Grace*, "that if ever men are turned from sin, God must undertake it, and he must be the doer of it; that it is his doing that must determine the matter; that all that others can do, will avail nothing, without his agency."²⁸⁵ The key to Edwards's work and, for that matter, to his life as well, lies in his own account of his early religious experiences. That account makes it plain that Edwards in his youth surmounted his logical objections to the doctrine of God's sovereignty and rose above a mere acceptance of the doctrine to an ecstatic delight in it.

From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God, and his justice

²⁸⁴ *Decrees and Elections, Works*, II, 525.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 547.

in thus eternally disposing of men, according to his sovereign pleasure. . . . But I have often, since that first conviction, had quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty than I had then. I have often since had not only a conviction, but a *delightful* conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. . . .

The first instance, that I remember, of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading these words, I Tim. i. 17. *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.* As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him forever! I kept saying, and as it were singing, over these words of scripture to myself.²⁸⁶

It is in this exalted and mystical worship of the divine that Edwards's views of human nature have their roots.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Edwards's whole thought life, it may be fairly said, was centered about the deep conviction of the all-sufficient, all-encompassing power of God which had mastered him as a young man. This power he delighted to contemplate and made it his chief purpose in life to proclaim. The conception of it was basic in all his theorizing, much as that theorizing was influenced by the psychological and philosophical beliefs current in his day. It underlay his attitudes toward human nature as they are revealed in his contributions to the controversies in which he engaged.

²⁸⁶ Dwight, *Life*, p. 60.

He defended the outburst of emotionalism known as the Great Awakening because it seemed to him to be an expression of the kind of religion toward which a recognition of the sovereignty of God would lead. That defense rested upon a psychology derived from the leading thinkers of his time, a psychology in which the passions were regarded as the prime movers in human life, and it included the positing of a supernatural sense granted arbitrarily by an all-powerful God to those men whom He had elected for salvation.

In the controversy over the freedom of the will, where Edwards revealed a wide acquaintance with the aspects of the problem that had been violently debated in the English intellectual world for generations, his chief interest was in establishing the principle that men's behavior is directed by a divine power outside themselves. He was anxious, in short, to lay a solid foundation for the Calvinistic doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

In arguing for another Calvinistic doctrine, the total depravity of man, against writers like John Taylor, Edwards was aiming at proving a principle closely related to his basic belief in the absolute authority of God. He was eager to make men recognize their utter helplessness by convincing them that because of Adam's sin they were, as men like Hobbes and Mandeville had taken delight in pointing out, completely under the domination of self-love and, since they lacked freedom of will, wholly unable of themselves to achieve virtue.

To make this helplessness more emphatically clear, he defined virtue as disinterested benevolence, endorsing a concept in accord with the views of morality held by writers like Cumberland, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson, with whom, understandably enough, he disagreed concerning men's possessing any natural impulses toward virtue.

All of these theories pointed toward and supported the conclusion dear to Edwards as a Calvinist that only divine

grace could make men truly good. Since men's characters are determined by the nature of their passions, which after the Fall of Adam are completely selfish, since men have no freedom of will by which they can reform their selfish natures, they can hope to achieve virtue only as God may according to his own good pleasure grant to them the supernatural sense by which they may be completely remolded in disposition. "All moral good," he concluded, "is from God."





